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RELIGION

Tryed by the

T E S T

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SOBER and IMPARTIAL

R E A S O N.

By the Most Reverend

Dr. EDWARD SYNGE,

Late Lord Archbishop of Tuam in Ireland.

AUTHOR of an *Answer to all the* EXCUSES
and PRETENCES *which Men ordinarily*
make for their not coming to the HOLY-
COMMUNION, &c.

THE THIRD EDITION,
Corrected and Enlarged.

L O N D O N,

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TO THE

Most Reverend Father in God,

W I L L I A M,

By Divine Providence,

*Lord Archbishop of Dublin, Pri-
mate and Metropolitan of Ireland.*

MY LORD,

WHOSOEVER, with any hope of
Success would contribute to the
Cure of a Malady, whether of
Body or Mind, must not only consider the
natural Force and Virtue of the Medicine he
prepares for it, but also have a special regard
to the Constitution and Disposition of the Pa-
tient for whom he intends it. For however
a Remedy may appear in itself to be well
adapted to the Disease, yet if the sick Man
either is not able to take it, or has not Strength
sufficient to retain and digest it, it is not pos-
sible

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sible that it should avail any Thing towards his Recovery.

How epidemical the Disease, not only of *Heterodoxy* but even *Infidelity*, is become amongst us, may indeed, and ought, by every good Man to be lamented; but is too plain to be either denied or dissembled: In Opposition to both which, though many excellent Books of all sorts have been written in our own Language, and some of them with the greatest Learning and Judgment; yet because many still pretend (and some of them perhaps truly) that they have not time to read large Volumes, or want Capacity to digest those that are a little more than ordinarily learned, I have ever looked upon it as a very useful Work (and much to be approved of in those who at any time have attempted it) to contract the most material Arguments that are urged in Defence of the true Religion, or any part of it; and to bring them within as narrow a compass, as may be consistent with both that Strength and Clearness, which we always suppose necessary in order to their prevailing upon the Minds of Men.

Something of this nature I have thought it my Duty, more than once, to endeavour from the Pulpit: And what I had so done, having met with some small Approbation from divers Persons of Candour and Judgment; when your Grace was pleased to lay your Commands upon me to perform, in my turn, the Office of

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of a Preacher at your ordinary Visitation, I thought I could not do a thing more acceptable to my Brethren of the Clergy, or at least the younger of them, than thus at one View to bring to their Remembrance the main and most fundamental Points of our Religion, (to which we ought all of us constantly to have an Eye in the whole Course of our Ministry) together with some of the chief Reasons and Arguments, whereby we maintain and defend them against the several sorts of Adversaries with whom we have to do.

I therefore carefully recollected what I had to this Purpose formerly studied and digested: And after I had comprised the most material part of it in an Hour's Discourse, I began to entertain a Resolution of making the whole more public; in hopes that, through the Blessing of God, it might from the Press have as good an Effect as, I was assured, it formerly had had upon some from the Pulpit.

In order hereunto, I communicated what I had written to several of the most judicious of my Friends; who were pleased not only not to disapprove of my Design, but also to suggest some Things to me, for the farther and better Prosecution of the most *necessary Part* of what I had undertaken; I mean, that which was most directly levelled against *Atheism* and *Infidelity*: And this is the Reason why I have now more largely insisted on the *Truth and Necessity of Revealed Religion*, than what

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at first I intended ; or may seem proportionable to the other Branches of the Discourse.

Having thus troubled your Grace with an Account of the Rise and Progress of this small Work, I humbly beg leave to prefix your Name before it ; not only as an Acknowledgment of my being immediately accountable to your Jurisdiction for whatever Doctrine I teach, or other ministerial Act I perform, within your Diocese, (which, antecedent to the Laws of the Land, I take to be a Consequence from the *Divine Institution of Episcopacy*) but also as a publick Testimony of that sincere Honour and Reverence, which your Grace has a just Title to from every one, I think, who has a true Value for either our Religious or Civil Constitution.

It is an unjust Reflection which some Men affect to make upon all Dedications of this sort, almost without any Distinction ; That for a Man to speak well of the Patron he has made Choice of, is, in their Opinion, little else but Flattery. But the Reason why the Life of a good Man is by all allowed to be written and published after his Death, will, I think, hold also as well for the giving him his due Character even while he is alive : I mean, that it may be an Incitement to others to follow his Example : And provided a Man says no more than what is true ; to condemn him of any secret or sinister Design therein, is to assume the Place of God himself,

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self in passing Judgment upon the private Thoughts of the Heart, which are only known unto him who is both the Maker and Searcher of it.

Had I a Design of writing a Panegyrick on your Grace, I am sure there is very sufficient Matter for it. The Strictness of your Life, yet without Moroseness or Sourness of Temper, all along from your Youth; your great Knowledge in all the useful Parts of Learning, notwithstanding the almost constant Interruption of your Studies, which for above these thirty Years past has unavoidably attended you; your great Labour and Diligence in the *personal* Discharge of your Cure, while you were a Parish-minister; your frequent and vigorous appearing in behalf of our Church and Religion, against Enemies of all Sorts; and more particularly at the Time when it was thought most dangerous so to do; [*Anno* 1687.] your unwearied Care and Vigilance in settling the Affairs of that Diocese unto which you were most deservedly promoted, after the late Times of Confusion; your more than ordinary Caution in admitting no Man to Holy Orders, or a Cure of Souls, until by a strict Examination he appears to be sufficiently qualified, both as to his Life and Learning; your narrow Inspection into the Behaviour of all your Clergy; and as far as it is possible, into every Thing under your Charge within your Diocese and Province;

your

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your Patience in hearkening to every Man that has any reasonable Cause of applying to you; your Readiness, as you have Opportunity, to encourage every Man who honestly endeavours to perform his Duty; your great Temper, as upon all other Occasions, so particularly in disregarding the rude Behaviour of those who seem to lay hold on any Opportunity to provoke you; the Mildness as well as Weight of your Reproofs to those that offend; your Readiness to pardon every Man that conscientiously returns to his Duty; and Resolution in punishing (to your Power) those who obstinately persist in the Breach of it; your Hospitality, Liberality, Charity; and (that I may not run out into numberless Particulars) your constant Adherence to the true Interest of Church and State; and Courage upon all Occasions to discharge a good Conscience, without any regard to the Passions of Men, or the humour of this or that Party; all this, I say, and more that might be reckoned up, would be a Subject ample enough to enlarge upon, had I the Vanity to think that any thing I can say, would in the least contribute to make your Grace better known than you already are to all good Men amongst us.

If I do not offend your Grace in thus making public mention of these Things, I am persuaded that no other *good Man* will in the least find Fault with me for it; and for the *uncharitable* Part of the World, I hope I have
 4 learned

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learned so much from your Grace's Example,
as not to regard their Censures. I am, with
all Respect and Duty,

Your GRACE'S

Most Obedient

And humble Servant,

Edw. Synge.

THE

DEDICATION

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Edw. Sanger



THE

P R E F A C E.

IT is a melancholy Reflexion, that many Men affect to treat Religion, and the Persons who are the immediate Officers of it, with more Spite and Ill-nature than they do any other Thing whatsoever. For Example, that many unnecessary Curiosities have been brought in, to the clogging and perplexing both of Law and Physick; and that there have been not a few unfair and corrupt Practitioners in both these Faculties, is what honest and sober Physicians and Lawyers, as well as other Men, have often complained of; yet no Man has hitherto been so wild as to insinuate from hence that therefore both these noble Professions should be (not only amended and reformed, but) wholly exploded and laid aside. And although there have been Multitudes of Pettyfoggers and Empiricks in all Ages, yet still there is no Man but believes that there are, or at least may be, many very honest Lawyers and Physicians in the World.

But

But with respect to Religion, and the Ministers of it, there is a Party of Men who endeavour to suggest another way of reasoning; and because it is not deny'd but that there have been many false Religions brought into the World, therefore they will allow none to be true. Because we own that the true Religion has, in divers Places and Ages, been corrupted, (partly by Ignorance and partly by the Craft of designing Men) therefore they will allow no Part of it to be genuine and sound: And because it is not contested but that there have been many ambitious and wicked Men, who for evil and worldly Ends have thrust themselves into the Offices of the true as well as false Religions, therefore under the Name of Priests (whom without distinction they render as odious as may be) they endeavour to explode and wholly lay aside the very Office of the Ministry; although for Fashion sake, they would sometimes seem to allow that there is some little Truth in Religion: And hence it has come to pass that Christianity has been industriously drest up in a Fool's Coat, and treated as if it were no better than a Fable or idle Tale: that Priests of all Religions, without any Distinction, have been pronounced to be the same, and the Sentence received with the Applause of many; and all manner of Distinction between those who are to minister in the Offices of Religion, and the People who are to receive the Benefit of such Ministry, by some has been represented as nothing more than

than a Design of crafty Men to gain to themselves a Dominion over the Consciences of others.

But how contrary is this way of arguing to that Clearness and Strength of Reason, which these Men seem so much to admire and stand up for? Put the Case that ninety and nine Parts of an Hundred of all the Lawyers and Physicians in the World should prove Fools or Knaves, would this be a good Reason why any Man should wholly reject either Law or Physick, and refuse to hearken to, or make the least use of a sober and honest Man of either Profession, where his Health and Estate were concerned? And if there had been more Knavery among the Priests than even they who aggravate those Things beyond Measure do pretend; would it follow from hence that therefore the Office of the Ministry itself is only a Cheat, and Religion no better than a Fiction? Certainly they who think freely ought always to judge of Matters, by the Reason of things, and not by the real or pretended corrupt Practices of any Sett or Order of Men: And upon this Issue I have endeavoured in the following Discourse entirely to put the Cause of Religion.

My Design being to offer unto others the same full and clear Conviction which, I bless God, I have in my own Mind about the Things I write of; wherever I have had Occasion to propose a Difficulty, I have not in the least endeavoured to conceal the Strength of it: And although I think I have given a sufficient and satisfactory

Answer to every Objection that has come in my way, yet because it is possible that my Words may not always fully convey the utmost of my Thoughts to the Mind of my Reader ; I have only this Request to make to him, that upon all such Occasions as those, he would endeavour to supply whatever Defects he finds me to have been guilty of, and consider not only what I have said, but also what farther might, if necessary, be offered upon each Subject. And if what I here write has but so far an Effect upon him as to put him upon a sober and impartial Enquiry after farther and better Satisfaction than what he thinks I have been able to give him ; I shall look on my Pains to be very well bestowed.

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RELIGION

TRYED BY THE

TEST of REASON.

§ I. **M**Y Intention in the following Discourse being with what Brevity and Plainness I can, to bring *Christianity*, as it is professed in the *Established Church*, to a fair and equal, yet strict and impartial Tryal at the Bar of *Reason*: For the more clear and methodical Proceeding herein, I know no better Way than to take my Beginning and Rule of Direction in this whole Affair, from those remarkable Words of the blessed Apostle *St. Peter*; which ought, I think, to make a deep Impression upon the Mind of every one who reads or hears them; *1 Pet. iii. 15. Be ready always to give an Answer to every Man that asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in you, with Meekness and Fear.* And before I come to draw any thing from the Words themselves, it will not be amiss to give a short Account of the Occasion of them, and their Connection with the rest of the Chapter.

At

At the Tenth Verse of this Chapter, St. Peter assures us that the best and most certain Way for a Man to live with Safety and Security to himself, even in this World, is to be truly virtuous and religious: *He that will love Life and see good Days, let him refrain his Tongue from Evil, and his Lips that they speak no Guile; let him eschew Evil and do good; let him seek Peace and ensue it.*

For the Confirmation of this Truth, he offers two Reasons: The first in the twelfth Verse; namely, that good Men are in the Favour, and consequently, under the immediate Protection of Almighty God; while the Wicked are exposed, even in this Life, to his Wrath and Vengeance: For (says he) *the Eyes of the Lord are over the Righteous, and his Ears are open unto their Prayers: But the Face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

The other Reason (contained in the thirteenth Verse) is drawn from that Temper and Disposition which even naturally prevails in Mankind, if it be not perverted by evil Principles, or Passion; that is to say, not to hurt, or injure those, who are so far from giving them any just Provocation, that on the contrary, they are ready, upon all Occasions, by kind and charitable Offices to engage and win the Love and Good-will of all that they converse with. *And who is he that will harm you, if ye be Followers of that which is good?* As if he had said in other Words, If those Men amongst whom you live, however of a different Persuasion from you in Religion, do always by Experience find that your Behaviour is inoffensive, and that Truth, Justice, and Charity do constantly prevail with you, and have a never-failing Influence upon all your Actions; what Man amongst them is there, or can there be, who, if he be guided but by

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by the common Principles of Reason and Prudence, will ever offer to do you any Hurt, when thereby it is evident that he can derive no real Benefit or Advantage to himself? *When a Man's Ways do thus please the Lord*, he may have a probable Expectation, even by the Rules of Reason as well as those of Religion, that *his Enemies*, if they are not altogether irrational in their Proceedings, will become so far reconciled, as at least to *be at peace with him*, Prov. xvi. 7.

But when it is considered how much the greatest part of Mankind are overswayed and governed by their Passions and Prejudices, in direct Opposition, very often, both to Reason and Religion; the Consequence from hence must needs (sometimes at least) be, that the more careful and exact a Man is in the Performance of his Duty, the more certainly may he expect to be hated and persecuted by some sort of Men for it.

In order therefore, to arm and prepare all Christians for such Hatred and Persecution, as God in his Providence, for their better Tryal, sometimes suffers to befall them; the Apostle proceeds to recommend unto them the three following Qualifications. *First*, That they be courageous and resolute; in the fourteenth Verse, *But and if ye suffer for Righteousness sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their Terror, neither be troubled.* *Secondly*, That they be inwardly and sincerely pious and holy; in the former Part of the fifteenth Verse, *But sanctify* (says he) *the Lord God in your Hearts.* And *Thirdly*, That they be well instructed and grounded in that Religion which they profess; in the Words of my Text, (for so I may have leave to call that Passage of Holy Scripture which I have chosen for the Ground-work of my whole Discourse) *Be ready always to give an Answer to every Man that asketh*

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asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in you, with Meekness and Fear.

To ask a Man a Reason of the Hope that is in him, signifies here, neither more nor less than in other Terms to demand why he is of such a Religion; and upon what Ground he expects to be saved by it. And the Word *Fear* I take, in this place, to be put not to signify the Fear of God, (although it may well enough be understood in that Sense also) and much less the Fear of suffering for Religion, or a good Conscience, (which St. *Peter* had just before forbid in the fourteenth Verse, as our Saviour also has expressly done, *Matt. x. 28.*) but rather to be added as a farther Explication of the Word *Meekness*; and to denote a Fear or Caution of offending or exasperating the Person or Persons, who at any time shall put such Questions or Demands to us, as my Text requires us to return an Answer to.

§. II. From the Words thus opened and explained, we may fairly draw these four Propositions.

First, That every Man ought to have some Reason for his being of that Religion which he professes. For how could it be possible for a Man to give an Answer to him that asks him a Reason of his Religion, if he has not first some Reason for it himself?

Secondly, That the Reason upon which a Man grounds his Religion ought to be such, as not only satisfies himself, but also may be fit and proper to convince any other Person, who duly and impartially weighs and considers it. For it would be to no manner of Purpose to offer any Reason for Religion (or indeed for any thing whatsoever) if the Reason so offered were not proper, in its own Nature, for the Conviction of such as should hearken to it.

Thirdly,

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Thirdly, That every Man when he is thereunto duly called and required, *should be ready freely to give the Reason for his being of such a Religion*, unto any one that demands it from him: Or (in the Words of my Text) to give an Answer to every one who asketh a Reason of the Hope that is in him, as the Apostle here directs.

And *Fourthly* and lastly, That this Reason ought always be given in so mild and meek a manner, as may not tend to exasperate, or give any just Ground of Offence unto any one that asks it: Or with Meekness and Fear, as my Text expresses it.

That these four Propositions are contained in the Text, and justly raised from it, I take to be sufficiently plain; I proceed now to offer what may be necessary for the farther Confirmation of each of them in the order they lie; and then from the whole, shall endeavour to draw such Inferences, as appear to be most proper and useful.

§ III. First then, that every Man ought to have some Reason for his being of that Religion which he professes. Nor is this any more than what is required from us in divers Places of the Holy Scriptures. St. Paul directs us first to prove all things, and then to hold fast that which is good, 1 Thes. v. 21. St. John gives us a Caution that we should not believe every Spirit; but make use of our Understanding, and whatever Helps God has furnished us with, to try the Spirits whether they are of God, 1 John iv. 1. The Men of Berea are approved of and commended, for searching the Scriptures of the Old Testament, (whose Authority they had before upon good Grounds received) whether those things which St. Paul taught were so, Acts xvii. 11. The same Apostle appeals to the common Reason of Man, when he says, I speak as to wise Men, judge
ye

ye what I say, 1 Cor. x. 15. And even our Saviour himself sufficiently intimates, that every Man's own Judgment, upon the best Information he can get, must be to him the immediate Ground and Rule of his Religion; when he condescends to submit even his own Mission and Doctrine to this Tryal: *Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?* says he, *Luke xii. 57.*

To these Passages of Holy Scripture many more, if occasion were, might be added; which, though not all of them so directly and expressly, yet by the clearest and best Consequence, do confirm and illustrate the Truth of this first Proposition. But, if we have Recourse to the Reason of the thing, it will set the Matter in a most clear Light, and demonstrate, beyond Exception, the Folly of that Man who takes his Religion upon Trust, or without such Proof as may be sufficient to convince and satisfy his own Mind of the Truth of it.

In all Matters of great and serious Consequence, no Man of common Prudence will proceed to act blindly and at random; but will always, to the best of his Power, first enquire into the Ground and Reason of what he is to do, before he ventures upon it. He that should buy or sell an Estate, build or pull down his House, or change his Habitation from one Place or Country to another, and not know why or for what Reason he does any of these things, would by all be looked upon as guilty of very great Folly, because upon such things as these the Comfort and Satisfaction of this present Life is supposed in a very great measure to depend: But what can be of greater, or so great Moment and Consequence to us, as Religion? upon which altogether depends the Favour of God,
the

Sect. IV. *by the Test of* REASON. 23

the Peace of our Conscience, and our eternal Welfare or Misery never to be retrieved. If then even in the Affairs of this World, which are but of an inferior Concern to us, we always think it necessary to weigh our Actions, and have a Reason for them, before we venture upon Matters that are of any Importance; much more certainly ought we to do the same in the Case of Religion, the Concern whereof is no less than eternal.

Farthermore, it is a Principle universally maintained, if not by all the World, yet at least by all such as profess Christianity; that if God, in the Course of his Providence, calls a Man thereunto, he ought readily to suffer any Persecution or Torment for the Sake of his Religion, and undergo even Death itself, if there be Occasion, rather than renounce or deny it: But he that should suffer all this, and yet not know why or wherefore he did so, whatever Opinion we might have of his Courage, it is certain we ought to have but very little of his Wisdom; and where a Man has no sufficient Reason for his Religion, it is not possible he should have any such for his suffering for it.

If then, in a Business of the greatest Concern, we ought by no means to act blindly and by Chance, not knowing whether we are in the right or the wrong; and if, upon Occasion, we would not suffer, like Fools, we know not why, it is no less than necessary that *every one of us should have some good Reason for the Religion we profess*; which was my first Proposition.

§ IV. I proceed to the second, which was, *That the Reason upon which a Man grounds his Religion, ought to be such, as not only satisfies himself, but also may be fit and proper to convince any other*

other Person who duly and impartially weighs and considers it.

If Religion were intended by God for a Secret of which when a Man had gotten the Knowledge, he were to keep it to himself, and communicate it to no other Person; then indeed, if he were once in his own Mind and Understanding sufficiently satisfied about it, it were no matter whether his Reasons were known or not known to the rest of the World; or what other Men did or might think of them: But the Case of Religion is quite otherwise; in which as all Men are universally concerned; so is it the Design and Command of God, that it should every where be publicly taught and propagated amongst all Mankind; that every Man who will but give impartial Attention to it, may come to the Knowledge, and embrace the Profession of it: For which End, as the Apostles of Christ were sent abroad with Commission and a Command to *preach the Gospel to every Creature*, Mark xvi. 15. so has God appointed a perpetual Order of Ministers in the Church, for the constant carrying on of the same Work, to the End of the World, wherever they can gain Admittance; besides, the Obligation that lies upon Parents to *bring up their Children in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord*, Eph. vi. 4. that is to say, both in the Knowledge and Practice of Religion; and upon all Christians whatsoever to *edify*, 1 Theff. v. 11. that is, in private Conversation, to instruct, admonish, and persuade *one another*, according to their several Abilities and Opportunities: But if the Reasons, upon which Religion is grounded, are not fit and proper in their Nature, to convince and satisfy every Man, who without Prepossession or Prejudice attends unto them, the Propagation of it throughout the World, in the Manner prescribed,

Sect. III. *by the Test of* REASON. 25

scribed, would be a thing altogether impossible; and therefore absurd to be either commanded or intended. For whosoever should go about to persuade other Men to believe Doctrines, obey Laws, regard Threatnings, or rely upon Promises, without offering them sufficient Reason to convince them of their Truth, Obligation, and Certainty; as in all Probability, he would gain but very few Profelytes, so would he most justly deserve with Scorn to be rejected by all Men of Sense and Understanding. It remains therefore that either Religion is not to be propagated in the Way which God has directed, and is the only Method that suits with rational Creatures; or else *the Reasons upon which it is grounded must be such as are fit and proper, in their own Nature, to convince every Man, who duly and impartially weighs and considers them*: Which was my second Proposition.

§ V. I pass on to the Third, which was this; That *every Man, when he is thereunto duly called and required, should be ready freely to give the Reason for his being of such a Religion, unto any one that demands it from him.*

It is not indeed every Man's Business to dispute or maintain an Argument for his Religion. Disputation is an *Art*, and requires long Study and much Practice, for a Man to become skilful in it; and he that has even the best Cause to manage, may yet, if he be a Stranger to this Art, be easily baffled by a cunning and sophistical Adversary; and the plainest Truths may be much injured by a weak and unpracticed Defender of them: Nor is every Man, who may be fit to be *received* into the Church of Christ, presently to think himself qualified for *doubtful Disputations*, Rom. xiv. 1. An honest Man, who with a very good Conscience engages in a Law-Suit, although he is able to give

to any impartial Man a fair and satisfactory Account of the Justice of his Cause, yet may not be fit to plead it in the Court; and a sincere Christian, who can give very good Reasons for the Religion he professes, may in like manner be of as little Ability to dispute for it.

Nor can it be the Duty even of the most learned Men and able Disputants, for ever to be wrangling with such as are *contentious* and obstinate, and will not *obey the Truth*, Rom. ii. 8. although proposed to them with sufficient Evidence for their Conviction: For this would be only to bestow their Time and Labour in vain, which might be employed to better and more useful Purposes. If an *Heretick* will not be reclaimed, even by repeated Instructions and *Admonitions*, he is to be *rejected*, Tit iii. 10. At least until such time as there may appear to be some better hopes of him; and it was our blessed Saviour's own Direction to his Apostles, that *where-soever Men would not receive them, nor hear their Words*, they should depart out of that House or City, and shake off the Dust of their Feet for a Testimony against them, Matt. x. 14. Luke ix. 5. which was accordingly put in practice by St. Paul and Barnabas, Acts xiii. 45, 51. whose Example, being grounded on the express Instruction of Christ himself, may certainly be followed by every Teacher or Preacher of the Gospel.

But as every Man, however unable to dispute much for his Religion, yet ought to have some good Reason for it, as I have already shewn; so ought he to be ready to offer this Reason to any one who demands it of him. And this he is obliged to do, as well for the Credit and Reputation of his Religion, as out of Love and Charity to the Soul of his Neighbour.

As

As to the former of these ; every Man in his several Station, and according to his Capacity, ought certainly to endeavour to bring true Religion as much into Repute as he can ; and to *adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things*, Tit. ii. 10. This being the only way we have to advance the Honour of our Creator ; for whose Glory we ought above all things to be concerned. But what greater Discredit can there be brought upon Religion, than that they who profess it should be either unable or unwilling to give any just Reason for their so doing ? It makes it look as if it was only a Device and Contrivance to impose upon the World, and had nothing of *Truth* and Reality in it ; when they dare not fairly bring it to the *Light*, that it may be *manifest* that it comes from *God*, John iii. 21. But, on the other side, when they who own and profess the true Religion are ready, upon all Occasions, to give such Reasons for it, as do not only clearly and thoroughly satisfy themselves, but are also proper and fit to convince all other Men, that impartially give Ear unto them : This most evidently demonstrates both their own Sincerity and also the Truth of that Religion which they profess ; and consequently frees it from all Suspicion of Imposture, and advances its Reputation with all sober and considering Men.

Then, as to the other thing mentioned, namely, Love and Charity ; we are partly taught by the Law of Nature, and more fully and distinctly by that of Christianity, that we ought to have an universal Love for all Men ; and consequently that we are obliged to do them all the Good which at any time reasonably may lie within our Power : Now the greatest Good which one Man can do another, and that without any In-

convenience to himself, is to assist and promote him in the Attainment of eternal Happiness; which is not any other way to be done, but by forwarding him in the Profession and Practice of true Religion; to a due Sense of which, it is not possible to bring a Man any other way, than by laying the Grounds and Reasons of it fairly before him: And however any one may be conscious to himself of the Weakness of his own Understanding, or his Inability to argue or dispute much, even for the Truth of Itself; yet if with Honesty and Sincerity he has first sought for Satisfaction in Religion, and then upon any fair Occasion proposes to another what he himself is so satisfied with, and this without betraying or injuring his Cause, by pretending to say more for it, than what he is qualified for; he knows not how great a Blessing, and what good Success God may be pleased to give to his pious and charitable Endeavours; especially if his Words are accompanied with that *Meekness* and *Gentleness*, which is one of the peculiar Marks of true Christianity.

§. VI. And this brings me to my fourth and last Proposition, namely, That *this Reason* (whatever it be which is offered for Religion) *ought always to be given in so mild and meek a manner, as may not tend to exasperate or give any just ground of Offence unto any one that asks it.*

It is a Fault, and I think a very great one, which too many of all Parties and Persuasions are guilty of, that when once they differ in Opinion about Religion, they often are not content to debate the Matter with Sobriety and Calmness; but they frequently give reproachful Language, and run out into personal Reflections, with bitter and satyrical Invectives, or at least oblique and harsh Insinuations,
each

Sect. VI. *by the Test of* R E A S O N. 29

each against the other; of which I with the Writings of some learned Men, of all Sides, were not too notorious an Instance: Who, while they appear zealous, each of them, for what they think to be the *Truth*, are often very forgetful of the plain Obligations of *Charity*; which surely is nevertheless due to a Man for being of a different Opinion from us. But methinks that even Reason itself, as well as my Text, should teach us to proceed after another Manner; that is to say, always to propose whatever we have to offer in Behalf of Religion, after so meek and gentle a way, as at least not justly to provoke our Adversaries to Passion, however obstinate they may be against Conviction.

Whosoever writes or speaks in Defence of Religion, his Design I suppose is, or at least ought always to be, first to convince the Judgment, by enlightening the Understanding of those to whom he applies himself; and having gained over the Judgment to the Acknowledgment of the Truth, then to influence the Will and Affections towards the Practice of it: Now, as there is a decent Warmth, tempered with Gravity, that is very proper to rouse and awaken such as seem to be asleep in Sin and Error, (of which we have more than once an Example in our Blessed Saviour himself, in his dealing with the Scribes and Pharisees) so if a Man goes beyond this and either sharpens, or rather sours his Discourse with Satyre and Mockery, or embitters it with Railing and Scurrility; the natural Consequence hereof will be, immediately to raise the Passion of those who find themselves thus uncharitably treated, and thereby to darken their Understanding, and render them so much the less capable of any sober or rational Conviction; which is directly contrary to the

very End and Design that in all Disputes (about Religion especially) every good Man ought to propose to himself. Whereas, on the other hand, if Men on these occasions would always take care to deliver themselves with as much Calmness and Moderation as the Case will bear, and never say any thing merely and on purpose only to provoke and vex their Adversaries; such soft *Answers* as these (especially if mutually given) would not fail to *turn away* at least some part of that *Wrath*, (Prov. xv. 1.) which now so strangely prevails between those of different Opinions in Religion; and consequently dispose them, much more than at present they seem to be, first for the discovering, and then for the embracing, of whatever shall appear to be a solid and real Truth: To which End and Purpose, the Admonition of St. Paul ought never to be forgotten by us, 2 Tim. ii. 24. *The Servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all Men; apt to teach; patient; in Meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them Repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth.*

And thus have I done with the four Propositions, which from my Text I laid down to be handled. Let us see now what proper and useful Inferences may be drawn from them.

§ VII. *First* then, from what has been said it will follow, *That Reason is always to be made use of in Matters of Religion.*

True indeed it is, that our Reason alone without the Assistance of Revelation, could never have dived into the mysterious Recesses of Christianity; nor must we pretend by the utmost Improvement of it, to be able fully to comprehend even those things which God has been pleased to reveal to us; for as yet *we know* but in *part*, and see but as
through

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through a Glass darkly, as *St. Paul* speaks, *1 Cor. xiii. 12.* But notwithstanding this, as our Reason is a necessary means to bring us to Religion, by enabling us to receive all such Proof as can be made of it; so is it no less needful for the right understanding both of its Doctrines and Precepts, and the drawing of useful Consequences from them. How does *St. Paul* reason with the *Athenians* concerning the Nature of God, and the Worship that is due to him? And when *Felix* sent for him, and heard him concerning the Faith in Christ, he reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come: *Acts xvii. 22. &c.* How does our blessed Saviour prove against the Sadducees, the Certainty of a future State, and the Resurrection from the Dead by a rational Deduction of Consequences from the Words of God unto *Moses*; for if *Abraham, Isaac* and *Jacob* were utterly dissolved, and in a State of Insensibility, from whence they were never to return, (as the Sadducees supposed) how could God at that very time, with the least Congruity of Speech, be said to be their God? and (to omit numberless Instances of most accurate Reasoning that occur throughout the Holy Scriptures) how is it possible for a Man to have such Reason for his Religion, as may not only satisfy himself, but also be sufficient to convince others of the Truth of it, (as I have shewn from my Text that every Christian is obliged to have;) if in the whole Procedure, and every part of it he be not allowed to make a sober Use of his rational Faculties? For when a Man shall ask us a Reason why we believe and rely upon such and such Principles of our Religion, in order to our Salvation; if the answer we return be not agreeable to the plain and allowed Rules of Reason, it must needs be impertinent and wide from the Purpose.

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In a Word, I would desire all those who seem to discountenance the Use of Reason in Matters of Religion, only to consider that Reason is nothing else but rightly *to apprehend* what is proposed to our Understanding, as far as it is so proposed, truly to judge of what we so apprehend; and regularly to *draw Consequences* from such Principles as have rightly possessed themselves of our Judgment; and as far as any Man does these three Things, so far beyond Dispute he makes use of his *Reason*: And will any Man say that he does not constantly do all these in Matters of Religion? For if he does not, then either he apprehends not at all, or else misapprehends what God has proposed to him; he judges not at all, or else frames a wrong Judgment concerning such things; and draws no Consequences at all, or else such as are false and absurd from them. The monstrous Absurdity of which three Things is so great, that no Man in his Wits sure will either defend or countenance them.

§ VIII. Secondly, From hence it appears, *how great an Absurdity they are guilty of, who ground their Religion upon no better Foundation than only that it was the Profession of their Parents or Ancestors, that they have been educated in it, or that it is the Religion of their Kindred or Country.*

Ask many of the Roman Catholicks of this Kingdom of *Ireland*, why they adhere to a Religion that has so many Errors and even gross Absurdities in it; and that with so much Obstinacy, that they will not so much as listen, or give Attention to better Information? And this is the Answer which commonly they will give you, that all their Forefathers, for many Generations, have been of this Perswasion; and this is the Religion of their best Friends and Relations,

Sect. IX. *by the Test of* R E A S O N. 33

tions, and generally of all their Countrymen, and therefore why should not they be of it? And though Protestants, who have sufficient Opportunities of more and better Knowledge, ought therefore to be furnished with a more satisfactory *Reason of the Hope that is in them*; yet I fear there are too many even of this Profession, that can give little other Account why they are so, but only that their Parents or Friends have brought them up in it: But he, who has no better Ground than this for his Religion, most certainly places it upon a very false and deceitful Foundation. For whatever Opinion he himself may have of the Judgment and Integrity of those Persons, upon whose Credit alone he so much relies; yet I have shewn that the Reason which every Man should have for his Religion, not only ought to be such as may fully *satisfy himself*, but must be fit and proper to convince others also; whereas such Pretences as these may as strongly be pleaded for any *false Religion* as for the true one; for a *Heathen in China*, or a *Mahometan in Turkey*, altogether as plausibly as for any sort of *Christian* in any part of *Europe*; and therefore can by no means be proper or effectual, to persuade any sober Man of the Truth of any Religion whatsoever.

§ IX. *Thirdly*, It also follows, that they who are called *Quakers* are in a very great Error; who ground their Religion upon a pretended immediate Revelation, made (as they alledge) unto themselves in particular, by the Spirit of God.

They affirm, That the Testimony of the Spirit is that alone by which the true Knowledge of God can be only revealed. These divine inward Revelations, they make absolutely necessary for the building up of true Faith; nor are they (say they) to be sub-

subjected to the Examination either of the outward Testimony of the Scriptures, or the natural Reason of Man, as to a more noble or certain Rule or Touchstone: For this divine Revelation and inward Illumination is that which is evident and clear of itself, forcing, by its own Evidence and Clearness, the well-disposed Understanding to assent, irresistibly moving the same thereunto: As their ablest Writer Robert Barclay tells us*.

It is no part of my present Design to dispute with these Men, what other Criterion, besides Reason and Scripture, they can have to satisfy themselves, that what they call a Divine immediate Revelation is really such; and not a strong Impulse only of their own warm Imagination, or sometimes even of Satan himself, who (as St. Paul assures us, 2 Cor. xi. 14.) is transformed into an Angel of Light. But taking it as for granted that they have all imaginable Assurance of this within themselves, yet still I demand how, and upon what good Ground, can they convince another of the Truth and Reality of what they thus pretend to?

That Reason is a Light to every Man; that by a sober Use of it, we are enabled to receive the solid Proofs that are brought for Revealed Religion, and (as far as is necessary) to understand the Doctrine and Precepts of it; that God, by the Grace and Assistance of his Holy Spirit, pleased farther to open the Hearts and Understanding of Men (Acts xvi. 14. Luke xxix. 45.) that they attend unto the things of Religion, and understand the Scriptures wherein they are contained: And lastly, that it is in his Power, by immediate Revelation, at any time, to communicate any Truth

whom

* Barclay's Apol. Prop. 2.

Sect. XI. *by the Test of* R E A S O N. 35

whomsoever he thinks fit: All this, I say, is freely granted. But if any Man shall go beyond all this, and set up such a *Revelation*, immediately made to himself, as the *Ground and Foundation of his Religion*; he ought to be able (as I have already shewn) to give such sufficient and satisfactory Proof thereof, as may convince others of its Truth and Reality: For if such Revelation is once to be allowed, without any other Proof than the Assertion of those who pretend to it, they may run into all the whimsical Extravagancies, and advance the most horrid Blasphemies imaginable; and who shall dare controul or contradict them in what they do by *Divine Revelation*? Or if such a Revelation pretended to by one Man, shall be opposed by the like Revelation, with as much Confidence pretended to by another; how shall we know who is in the right, and who in the wrong, except some outward Proof be given whereby other Men, as well as themselves, may be enabled to distinguish between a Revelation and a Delusion?

All the Revelations of Religion, that God has hitherto been pleased to make to Mankind, have partly by Miracles, and partly by other Acts of his Providence) been sufficiently attested; not only inwardly to those who immediately received them, but also outwardly to every one who would make an impartial Enquiry into the Truth of them: Nor did our Saviour himself * expect that Credit should be given even to his own Divine Mission and Revelation, upon any other Terms. Some sufficient outward Proof then we require of those inward Revelations which these Men pretend to; which until they shall give, and that in a very

* Luke vii. 22. Mark xvi. 17.

very satisfactory Manner, we cannot but conclude that the very Foundation, upon which they build their whole Religion, is altogether deceitful and delusive, however speciously they have contrived the Superstructure, to make it look fair and plausible to the World.

§ X. *Fourthly*, Another Consequence, no less fairly deducible from the Premises, I take to be that *they are altogether* in an Error who build their Faith entirely upon the Credit and Authority of the Church of Rome.

To set this Matter in a true and clear Light, let us suppose the Question to be put to a sober Papist, Why he believes that System of Doctrines which make up the Religion of that Church, and consequently why he hopes to be saved in that Belief? and the Answer he will give you is this, That the immediate Reason of his Belief, is the Authority of God, who has made these Doctrines known to Mankind. If you demand what Assurance he has that God has made these Doctrines known? he will tell you he is sure of it, because he finds them taught as Divine Truths, and proposed as Objects of Faith by the Church. And if you farther ask, How he knows that that Society of Men who live in Communion with the Pope or Bishop of Rome constitutes and makes up the Church? all the Answer he can possibly give you to this Question, must of Necessity be resolved into this, That he is certain it is the true Church because it makes Profession of the true Faith †. For whatever Notes or Marks of the Church they pretend to reckon up, there are but three Things that go to make up the formal Evidence

† Bellarm. de Eccles Milit. L. iii. C. 2. 5. Nostra autem

Sect. XI. *by the Test of R E A S O N.* 37

sence, and complete the Definition of it ; namely, First, *The Profession of the true Faith.* Secondly, *The Participation of the Sacraments.* And, Thirdly, *A due Subjection to lawful Pastors.* The two last of which (according to themselves) are either Parts, or at least inseparable Consequences of the first ; it being always reckoned amongst them as a matter of Faith, to believe the Number, Nature, and Necessity of their Sacraments ; and to own the Power and Authority of the Pope, and other Pastors, that, according to the Laws of their Church, are in Subordination to him.

Thus then the Matter stands: A Papist believes his Faith and Religion to be true, because it is revealed by God : That it is revealed by God, he believes because he finds it professed and taught by the true Church : And that this same Society of Men which he means doth make up and constitute the true Church, he also believes for this Reason, because they profess and maintain the true Faith and Religion ; and so proves the first thing by the second ; the second by the third ; and the third by the first again : Which is a way of arguing that the Logicians call a *Circle*, and is justly exploded by all Men of the least Sense and Understanding.

Since then (as I have shewn) every Man ought to have some good Reason for his Religion, which may be fit and proper not only to satisfy himself, but also to convince others ; that since this way of reasoning in a Circle cannot possibly afford any true Conviction or Satisfaction to any Man ; it follows that they who have no better Support than this for their Religion, do certainly build it upon a false Foundation.

§. XI. *Fifthly*, From what has been said, it may be farther inferred against the Church of *Rome* ;

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that

that, however necessary it may be frequently to admonish all Sorts of Men, that they be very cautious and sober in all the Interpretations which at any time they put upon the Word of God, or any Part or Passage of it; *yet it is not lawful to binder any Man, whether learned or unlearned, from reading, or hearing the Holy Scriptures read, in such a Language as he understands.* For since every Man ought to have some good Reason that he may satisfy his Conscience of the Truth of that Profession, in and by which he hopes to be saved, and therefore must not take his Religion upon Trust, on the Credit of any Man or Church whatsoever; but is bound to make the best use he can of that Understanding which God has given him in the search of it, (as I think has already been sufficiently proved;) it will follow that no Man ought to be debarred from the use of any Means that he shall think necessary or proper to make use of in an Enquiry of such vast Importance to him. Every Man indeed is bound in Charity (as he has Ability and Opportunity for it) to advise and admonish his Neighbour the best he can, for his Soul's good: Nor do I doubt but that, in some Cases, human Laws may justly be enacted by proper Penalties, to restrain Men from *teaching*, or *propagating* some sort of Opinions or Doctrines: But if a Man gives sufficient Security that he will not disturb or corrupt the Public with his private Thoughts or Errors, and desires no more but that he may not be hindered from finding out the surest way he can for *himself* to go to Heaven; who has any Warrant or Authority from God by *force* to restrain or thwart him in such a Resolution?

Let us then suppose the very worst; which is, that ignorant Men will not oftentimes be content to dwell upon those Passages of Holy Scriptures,
that

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that are most plain as well as instructive; but are curious and prying into the most obscure Parts of it: Which (notwithstanding all the Caution and Advice that is given them by their Teachers) many of them will misinterpret; and *wrest* not only them, but *the other Scriptures also, to their own Destruction*, 2 Pet. iii. 16. Let us suppose all this, I say, and then consider what will follow.

Because many ignorant Men will probably make an ill Use of the very Means of Instruction that God in his Providence has provided for all Mankind, and exposed indifferently to the View and Use of all that will have recourse thereto; does this give sufficient Authority to the Governours of any Church, under severe Penalties, to withhold these Means from *all* that are of that sort; and thereby to keep them, most certainly, in greater Ignorance than otherwise they would be?

I (for Example) am a Man of little Knowledge, and a slender Capacity; yet sensible of the Obligation that lies upon me to seek for what Instruction I can in Religion, in order to my eternal Salvation. I am (suppose) in a good measure convinced that Religion which was taught by Jesus Christ and his Apostles, is the true Religion; but (amongst the many Disputes that are in the World) am at a loss to know what are the genuine Doctrines of Faith, and Rules of Life that go to make up the whole System of it; now all who call themselves Christians being agreed in this, that the Holy Scriptures, if rightly understood, would give me great (and, as some hold, full and sufficient) Information in what I desire to learn; I would willingly set myself to read, and study them the best I can, in my own Mother Tongue, into which I understand they have been several times translated. No, say the Divines of the Church of
Rome,

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Rome,

Rome, you are an *unlearned Man*; and therefore in all probability will very much misinterpret the Holy Scriptures. But have not very many *learned Men* also most grossly misinterpreted these sacred Writings? And why then should such as they be permitted to read them? But what other and better way must they take, to be well convinced and satisfied touching the genuine Doctrines and Precepts of Christianity? Why, say they, rely upon the Authority of the Church. But I have just now shewn that they are altogether in an Error, who build their Faith upon the Credit and Authority of the Church of *Rome*; and the same Reason would hold as well against any other Church, that in this manner should attempt to impose a Religion upon me: Neither am I in this Matter to depend upon the Credit of my Parents, Kinsfolks, or Country; but must have some better Ground of satisfying my Conscience, as I have already proved: And what better Ground of Satisfaction in this Case I can have, than to search and enquire the best I can into the true Meaning of so much of the Holy Scriptures, as I am able, with what Helps are in my Power, to attain unto, I confess is beyond my Conception or Imagination.

I therefore conclude, that no Man ought to be debared from reading or studying the best he can, the Holy Scriptures in any Language that he understands. I grant that he may err in the Interpretation of them; and if his Error be occasioned by any Fault of his own, it is only at his own peril; if not, I cannot but think that God, who is gracious, will be merciful to him on that account: But if, not content to enjoy the Freedom of his own Conscience, he endeavours to propagate his false Opinions, and thereby is the Cause

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Cause of Disturbance in the World ; there may be proper and legal ways of restraining and punishing of him, according to the Nature and Demerit of his Crime.

St. *Peter*, we find, was very well aware that they who were not only *unlearned*, but also *unstable*, were very apt to wrest not only the difficult Passages in St. *Paul's* Epistles, but also *the other Scriptures*, unto their own *Destruction*, 2 Pet. iii. 16. Now if the Consequence from hence were, that therefore such Persons should not read the Scriptures at all, I cannot but think he would have given some Intimation of a matter of so great Importance : Whereas the only Inference which he draws in the following Words, is, that Men should be cautious, (and that at their own Peril) what Doctrines or Sentiments they entertain : *Ye therefore, beloved, (saies he) seeing you know these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the Error of the Wicked, fall from your own Steadfastness*, ch. xvii.

And if it be a good Argument that *unlearned* Men ought not to study the Scriptures, because we find that they often misunderstand them ; whereby they can do little Hurt, but only to themselves alone, it will hold much better against those that are *learned* : Experience having abundantly assured us, that many of them have not only misinterpreted the Text, but also by their Art and Eloquence, often drawn away multitudes of People to embrace their Errors.

§. XII. *Sixthly*, and that I may now at last come home to ourselves : From what has been said it will appear, how happy we of the Established Church are (or may be, if the Fault be not our own) not only in that every one amongst us has full and free liberty to make all the Enquiry he can into

into the Grounds and Reasons of his Religion; but also, and chiefly, that there is no part of our Religion, nor any thing by our Church required from any Member of it, but will fairly and fully bear the Test of the most rational Disquisition; so that every Man of us, that will but be at a little pains to make the Enquiry, may very soon not only satisfy his own Conscience why he is and ought to be of our Communion, but also be able (as my Text requires) to give a sufficient *Answer to every other Man, that asketh him a Reason of the Hope that is in him.*

And because this is a matter of very great Importance to us all, I shall spend the remaining part of this Discourse in shewing upon what solid and satisfactory Grounds it is, that we expect eternal Salvation, in the Profession and Practice of that Religion which by Law is Established amongst us; and that in such a manner, as I think may abundantly convince every Man that is sober and impartial in this Enquiry: In order whereunto it is most proper to observe, that if any Man ask *why we hope to be saved in our Church and Religion*; his Demand will in effect include these four Questions.

First, Why we are of any Religion at all, and not either downright *Atheists*, who deny the very Being of God; or *Epicureans*, whose Principles lay no Foundation for any Worship to be paid to him?

Secondly, Why we embrace the *Christian Religion*, and are neither *Jews*, *Mahometans*, nor *Heathens*?

Thirdly, Whereas the grand Division of Christians, in these Parts of the World, is into those of the *Church of Rome*, and those of the *Reformed*

Sect. XIII. *by the Test of* R E A S O N. 43

or *Protestant Church*; Why we are *Protestants* and not *Papists*; of the *Reformed* rather than the *Roman Religion*?

Fourthly and lastly, since there are some Divisions even amongst *Protestants* themselves, it may reasonably be required that we should shew, why we are *Protestants* of our *Established Church*, and not of any Party that dissents or divides from her?

To which four Questions if we return such plain and solid Answers, as may easily be understood, and are sufficient to give full Satisfaction to every Man of common Sense and Understanding; nothing I think will be wanting for the full Performance of what I have shewn my Text requires from every Christian: And although to do any tolerable Justice to each of these Points, would require rather a Volume than only a part of a short Discourse, yet, such is the native Light of Truth, that I doubt not, with God's Blessing, but by briefly proposing some of the chief Heads or Topicks of what has often been, and may much more largely be said upon them, I shall either give good Satisfaction to every reasonable Man, or at least put him in the way of farther satisfying himself, if he will but be at the Pains of a sober and diligent Enquiry into the matter.

§. XIII. First then we are to consider why we are of any Religion at all, and not *Atheists* or *Epicureans*.

However difficult the very Notion of *Eternity* may appear to our finite and narrow Understanding, yet it is plain, even to Demonstration, that of necessity there must be an eternal Being, which never had a beginning. For if we could suppose but one single Instant in which nothing at all did exist; since from no Cause no Effect can follow,

follow, the Consequence unavoidably must be, that nothing could ever be produced into Existence. It follows then, that either the World itself must be eternal, or else, that there is some eternal, original Cause of it.

I grant indeed that whichsoever of these Opinions we hold, we are equally attended with this Difficulty, That *the Understanding of Man being finite and limited, cannot frame a clear and comprehensive Notion of [Eternity, which is] a Thing unlimited and infinite*: And yet notwithstanding this, That either the World is eternal, or that there is some eternal Cause of it, is, as I have shewn, no less than demonstrable: One side or other of the Disjunction must of necessity be taken; and a Difficulty that equally presses upon both Parts, cannot justly be made an Argument against either. A prudent Man therefore ought to look farther, and thoroughly consider what Difficulties more there may be, which arise upon one side of the Question, but are fairly avoided on the other; and where he finds the least and the fewest, there he will fix and determine his Judgment.

As to the Eternity of the World, take it which way you will, it involves such Difficulties or rather Absurdities, as are neither to be avoided nor digested.

If you say that the *Matter* of the World, having for numberless Ages lain quiet and altogether without Motion, at last began to move; it is absurd to imagine that *Matter* (which of itself is supposed to be an inert and unactive Being) after having lain from all Eternity in an universal State of Quiet and Non-motion, should at last, without any other efficient Cause *but itself*, pass into a State of Motion and Activity.

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If you say that the Motion of Matter was eternal, and that by continual motion it at last without any Contriver but meer Chance, fell of itself into that regular Order, which for so many Years it has been found exactly and uniformly to have kept, (to say nothing of the great Absurdity of ascribing an *eternal* Property to matter, [*viz.* Motion] which by all is allowed not to be *natural* or *essential* to it) this is altogether as foolish as to imagine, that a great quantity of Brass and Iron being melted together in a Chaldron, and violently stirred about, should, in process of time, frame itself into Springs, Wheels, &c. and put itself together into a most curious Clock, with all imaginable Variety as well as Regularity of Motions, and of itself should go for above five thousand Years, without ever erring so much as one single Minute, or any the least Appearance that ever it is like to be out of Order. Or, that a blind Man, who knew nothing of Letters, nor understood a Word of Greek, might yet, by often moving a Pen at random upon Paper, at last write such a Poem as *Homer's Iliads*, without making a false Quantity or misplacing so much as an Accent.

Or, lastly, If you shall say that the World, in the same manner and Posture that now it exists, has always and for ever been: Since *unthinking Necessity* is altogether as blind as *Chance* itself; the same Absurdity that I have last represented to overthrow the Opinion of the World's being made by *Chance*, will here again take place; and may as effectually be urged, as it was in the other Case. And besides this, the Eternity of the World this way stated, necessarily implies an *eternal Succession* of each particular kind of Animals and Vegetables, as well as of Days and Years; and such
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an eternal Succession, as necessarily implies a *Number actually infinite* : For if (for Example) there has been an eternal Succession of *Men* in the World ; the *Number* of all those who have been alive and are now dead, taken together, must be *actually infinite*. And yet an *eternal Succession* of Things without any beginning, or a *Number actually infinite*, is to me as plain and palpable a Contradiction, as any that can be imagined : There being no Number whatever, but what, by the Accession of more Particulars, may become bigger ; and more Days and Nights having passed ; and more Men been born into and dyed out of the World by this time, than what had been a Year or two ago : Nor can we imagine, but whatsoever has had an *end*, (as all the past Generations of Men have had, and this must soon have) must of necessity also have had a *beginning*.

“ Add to this, that where there is a *Succession*
 “ of Things, each and every of which Things has
 “ had a beginning, there the whole *Succession* must
 “ have had a beginning also. Since then each
 “ and every Animal, Vegetable, Day, and Year
 “ of this World, has had a beginning ; it follows
 “ I think to a demonstration, that the whole *Suc-*
 “ *cession* of them must necessarily have had a begin-
 “ ning ; and consequently that this World, in the
 “ State and Condition wherein we find it, cannot
 “ possibly have been eternal, or without any begin-
 “ ning at all.

These Things being duly considered, I cannot imagine how the Eternity of the World can in any Sense be allowed of or admitted. Let us pass then to the other part of the Disjunction, and see whether the same Difficulties, or any that are equal to them, do arise upon this also.

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They who assert, That this World had a *beginning*, but that there is an *eternal* original Cause of it; do maintain, that as this Cause is an intelligent Being, so it is altogether unchangeable, and in its very nature incapable of any Alteration or Succession. Whatsoever therefore is willed or decreed, it did it from all Eternity, although the outward visible *Effect* of such Will or Decree might be of such a nature, as to be incapable of being eternal, and consequently must have a *beginning* of its actual Existence. Now here again we meet that common Difficulty which I first mentioned; *viz.* That *the Understanding of Man being infinite and limited, cannot frame a clear and comprehensive Notion of [Eternity, which is] a Thing unlimited and infinite.* But this Difficulty being (as I have already said) to be wholly laid aside, because it equally presses upon both Parts of the Disjunction, there is none other that arises or occurs, to be made an Objection against the Doctrine.

A spontaneous beginning of Motion, in an *eternal inactive Being*; *eternal Motion*, and yet not *natural or essential* to the thing moved; the most *curious and regular Contrivance*, and yet to be the Effect of blind Chance or *fatal Necessity*, which is equally *blind*; *eternal Succession* without a *beginning*; a *Number actually infinite*: All these, I say, which affect one side of the Question only, are most gross and manifest Absurdities. But the *eternal Existence of an immutable Being, without any manner of Change or Succession*, which is the only Objection against the other side, has no other Difficulty in it, but what equally presses upon both Parts; *viz.* That *the very Notion of Eternity is too big for the human Understanding.*

Add to all this, that not only the History written by *Moses*, but all others that trace Things backward

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backward to the most remote Antiquity, do unanimously concur in such an Account of the Original of Nations, and the gradual Plantation of the several Parts of the Earth, (some of which, though commodiously capable of Inhabitants, are yet to this Day uninhabited) as plainly shews, that the Tradition universally received among Mankind was always this, That the World was not *eternal*, but had a *beginning*.

But because some Men are obstinate, in adhering to an Opinion which they have once entertained, whatever Arguments are, or may be brought against it; let us suppose (notwithstanding all that has been said) that the World might possibly have been from all Eternity: Yet still, if both in the whole, and every particular part of it, there appears to be all the *Design* and *Contrivance* that can well be imagined, it must of necessity follow that there is some eternal *Contriver*, which in *Nature*, if not in *Order of Time*, is the original and first Cause of it: It being (as I have already said) equally absurd to imagine, that the most exact and regular *Design* and *Contrivance* should be the Effect either of blind *Chance*, or *unthinking fatal Necessity*.

And if this same *first and original Cause* can, beyond all Exception, be proved to be most powerful, wise and good; then the being of a God is clearly and fully demonstrated.

Let us then but take a View of the Structure of the Universe, as far as it is or may be the object of our Sense, or Knowledge; let us consider all the several Parts, that go to make up the whole Composition; together with their various Operations, Motions, and mutual Relations one to another; the Sun, the Moon, the Stars and Planets which in a due Measure shed their comfortable

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Light, Heat and Influence, upon us and our Habitation here below; and by the constant Regularity of their Motions, distinguish and mark out unto us the Day for Labour, the Night for Rest, and the several Seasons of the Year for the Production, ripening and gathering in the Fruits of the Earth; without which it were impossible, by the Course of Nature, that living Creatures should subsist; the Fire, the Air, the Earth, the Water; the Ebbing and Flowing of the Sea; the Dew, the Rain, the Fountains and Rivers; the great Variety of Trees, Herbs, and all sorts of Fruits and Vegetables, which the Earth produces and propagates; some for Food, some for Medicine, and some for Delight: All the several sorts of Animals in the Earth, and the Water; with the admirable Structure of their several Bodies, according to the Place or Element wherein they have their different Abode or Habitation; and the several Senses and various Instincts implanted in them, whereby they are enabled to preserve themselves, and also continue their proper and respective Kinds or Species: And lastly *Man*, the Lord of this inferior World; his Body framed in a wonderful manner, and his Mind endowed with the noble Powers and Faculties of Understanding, Will, and Memory, far beyond any other earthly Creature whatsoever: Whereby he is enabled to distinguish between not only sensible, but also rational Good and Evil, to pursue the one and avoid the other; and not only each Man to preserve and provide for himself, but also in some measure to promote the general Comfort and Happiness of all Mankind. Let us, I say, thoroughly consider all these Things, and farther subdivide them into as many Particulars, as our own Thoughts and Observation will easily suggest unto us; and then demand, Can any thing

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be a greater Argument of *Power*, than this vast and stupendous Fabrick (the Extent of which is unknown to us) is of his, that first made and still supports it? Can any thing be a greater Demonstration of *Wisdom*, than its Beauty, Order, and the mutual Correspondence of its several Parts, are of his, who thus has contrived it? And, lastly, is not the great Usefulness of all its Parts, (which more and more we every Day discover) in order to the several Ends for which they are evidently framed, an abundant Argument that the Author and Maker of it is a Being of the greatest *Goodness* and Beneficence, in that he has thus provided not only for the Being, but also for the Well-being of all his Creatures, according to their several Capacities? He that can deny, or but entertain a Doubt of any of these Things, must certainly be void of all serious Thought and Consideration; and consequently we may, with holy *David*, most certainly pronounce him to be a *Fool*, who dares, but even in his Heart, to say that *there is no God*, Ps. xiv. 1. And since the whole Course of the Universe, and all that appears, or can be so much as imagined in it, may altogether as well be accounted for upon the Supposition of one only God, as of many; and Beings are not in our own Fancy to be multiplied without any manner of Cause or Reason for it; it will follow, that sober Reason would of itself conclude for the *Unity* of the Divine Nature, although Revelation (the Certainty of which I shall presently prove) had not given us such farther Assurance, as it has, that there is but *One God*.

And if once the Being of God, as the Author and Contriver of this whole World and every thing in it, be thus beyond all Contradiction established; the Relation which we, as his Creatures, bear unto him, and the constant Dependence

Sect. XIV. *by the Test of* REASON. 51

dance which of Necessity we always must have upon him, do so plainly infer an Obligation upon us (as we are rational, and also endowed with Freedom of will and a Power of Election) always to honour, worship and obey him, as far as we can any way come to the Knowledge of his Will and Pleasure, that I need not offer any thing farther for the Proof it: And this I take to be a sufficient Answer to the first Question; namely, *Why we are of any Religion at all, and not downright Atheists or Epicureans?*

§ XIV. But this Answer will receive a new and farther Confirmation, from that which we have to make to the second Question that comes next to be considered; namely, *Why we do not embrace the Christian Religion, and are neither Jews, Mahometans, nor Heathens?*

To this our Answer is, That we are Christians, (and of no other Religion) because *Christianity is from God*; and if we can make this Assertion good, it not only shews the Obligation that lies upon us to be of this Religion rather than of any other, but also is a farther Proof of the Being of God, and consequently of the Necessity of Religion in general.

Now, to prove Christianity to be from God, or in other Terms, that God is the Author of it, we principally insist upon four Arguments; the first drawn from its own intrinsic Wisdom and Goodness; the second from Prophecies; the third from Miracles, and the fourth from the great Success which this Religion met with at its first Appearance in the World. Which four things, taken all together, we judge abundantly sufficient to establish the main Conclusion.

§ XV. As to the first of these; if we allow God to be the first and Original Cause of all
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Things, and at the same time to be most wise and good, as from his Works has been already shewn; the Consequence must be, that whatever Doctrine, Discipline, or Institution, contains or carries in itself the most consummate Goodness and Wisdom, that such a Thing is capable of; and has nothing in its Contrivance but what is both wise and good; may well be ascribed to God (who is the Fountain of all Wisdom and Goodness) as its mediate or immediate Author: And as whatever tends to the advancing and promoting both the Honour and Glory of the Creator, and the common Welfare and Happiness of the Creature, is by all Men allowed to be *good*; so if it be as well fitted and contrived as may be, in order to the compassing of so noble an End; it must be looked upon as having all the Marks and Tokens of *Wisdom*, as well as *Goodness*, of which it is or can be capable.

Let us then take but a transient View of Christianity, and we shall immediately find that it gives us the highest and most exalted Notions of God that we are capable of receiving; it teaches us to look up n him as a Being most absolutely perfect in all respects; a Spirit infinitely wise, powerful, just and merciful; *the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the blessed and only Potentate, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords; who only hath Immortality, dwelling in the Light which no Man can approach unto, whom no Man hath seen, nor can see,* 1 Tim. i. 17. and vi. 15, 16. In a word, whatever is great, good, or glorious, far beyond the Comprehension or shallow Imagination of Man, is all in the highest Degree taught and proclaimed, throughout the Holy Scriptures, of God the Creator of Heaven and Earth; and all Christians are thereby taught and commanded to give Honour, Glory,

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Glory, Praise and Adoration, with all their Powers and Faculties, accordingly to him.

Again, if any thing can tend to the general Happiness of Mankind here, and qualify them for that which is future in Heaven hereafter; it must be universal Piety, Truth, Justice, Charity, Humility, Sobriety, Temperance, and whatever else is necessary to raise their Minds above those little and unworthy Ends which worldly Men propose to themselves, and which are the Cause of so much Contention and Confusion here, and (as all Religions do teach) of intolerable Punishment and Misery hereafter; and that all these Things, in the very utmost Degree, are taught, expressed, and most strictly required by the Christian Religion, without the least Allowance or Mixture of any thing that is evil or impure; a very little Acquaintance with the New Testament will soon inform us.

And, *Lastly*, If any thing can, at the same time, secure our everlasting Happiness in Heaven hereafter, and also add something to that of those blessed and immortal Spirits who there already enjoy the beatifick Presence of God; it must be that we (*Luke xv. 10.*) who are Sinners, and thereby have incurred God's Wrath, are admitted to Repentance, and a possibility of Pardon and Reconciliation, upon such Terms as are neither inconsistent with any of God's Attributes, on the one hand, nor impossible or impracticable to us, on the other: And how well the Gospel is calculated for this purpose, when it teaches us that *Christ dyed for our Sins, 1 Cor. xv. 3. that Repentance and Remission of Sins should be preached in his Name among all Nations, Luke xxiv. 47. and that God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him, Luke xi. 13.* with a greet deal more of the same Import;

Import; will soon be obvious to every one, who sets himself but a little seriously to consider it.

It would far exceed the designed Proportion of this Part of my Discourse, should I proceed to consider the several and particular Doctrines and Rules of Christianity, and farther to shew the great Wisdom and Goodness of God that appears in all and each of them. But if we can but suppose that any Religion whatever may be worthy of and agreeable to the infinite Perfections of the Divine Majesty, there certainly is nothing wanting in that which was taught by Christ and his Apostles, to raise it completely up to that Character; and this is the first Argument which we urge to prove that Christianity is from God; namely, the intrinsic Wisdom and Goodness of the Religion itself. I proceed to the

§ XVI. Second, which is drawn from *Prophecies*; whereby this Truth is farther confirmed.

That the whole Body of the Jewish Nation have, for above these seventeen hundred Years past, been in constant Expectation of the Appearance of an extraordinary Person, to be sent by God into the World, under the Title of *Christ* or the *Messiah*, is what they themselves own, and no Man does or can deny: And this very Expectation sufficiently shews, that some Predictions or *Prophecies* (whether true or false) there have been, that such a Person was to come; for if no one had ever pretended to foretel any such Thing, what could possibly raise such an universal Imagination, and that for so many Years, in such a vast Multitude of People? It is not now my Design to enter into a particular Examination of all these Prophecies: But if all the most eminent and remarkable ones of them, are clearly and conspicuously fulfilled, in the Person of our
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Sect XVI. *by the Test of* R E A S O N. 55

Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus, and there is not so much as one of all those ancient Predictions, that was ever by the Jews themselves interpreted of the Messiah, but what is fairly fulfilled and accomplished in him; this will at the same time shew, that these were real Prophecies, and not Figments; and that Jesus Christ, whom we own and receive, is really and truly the Person prophesied of: And since it is allowed on all Hands, that none but God can foretel such things as are in themselves contingent, at any considerable distance of Time before they come to pass; the Consequence must be, that Jesus is that Messiah, whom God did long since promise to send into the World; and consequently, that the Doctrine and religion which he taught, is from God himself.

Now, the most remarkable Prophecies, or some of them at least, of ancient Record in the *Old Testament*, and generally understood to be meant of the Messiah, are these; That he should be the *Seed of the Woman*; That he should *bruise the Serpent's Head*, and have his *Heel bruised* by him, *Gen. iii. 15.* That he should be the *Seed of Abraham*; and that *in him all the Nations of the Earth should be blessed*, *Gen. xxii. 18.* That the *Scepter should not depart from Judah*, nor a *Lawgiver from between his Feet*, until he should come; and that unto him should the gathering of the People be, *Gen. xlix. 10.* That he should be a *Prophet like unto Moses*; raised up among the People to speak the Words that God should put into his Mouth; and that whosoever of the People of Israel should not hearken to his Words, God would require it of them, *Deut. xviii. 18, 19.* That he should be from the *Root of Jesse*, (who was the Father of King David;) that he should stand for an *Ensign of the People*, to which the *Gentiles*

tiles should seek, and that his Rest should be glorious, Is. xi. 10. That the Government should be upon his Shoulders; that his Name should be called, wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace: Of the Increase of whose Government and Peace there should be no end, upon the Throne of David, and upon his Kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with Judgment and with Justice, from henceforth even for ever, Is. ix. 6, 7. That he should be conceived and born of a Virgin, and called Immanuel, (which signifies God with us) Is. vii. 14. Mat. i. 23. That he should be despised and rejected of Men; a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief: That he should bear our Grievs and carry our Sorrows, be wounded for our Transgressions; and that with his Stripes we should be healed, the Lord laying on him the Iniquity of us all, Is. liii. 3. &c. with more to this purpose in the same Chapter. That he should come within a certain Number of Years foretold by the Prophet Daniel, (Dan. ix. 24, &c.) and be cut off, but not for himself; after which the City and the Sanctuary should be destroyed, and the Sacrifice and Oblation should cease. These, I say, (with divers others that may be reckoned up) are remarkable Prophecies concerning the Messiah, recorded in the Old Testament many Centuries of Years before our Blessed Saviour's Appearance in this World: To which also may be added a great Number of Other Passages, which by the Jews themselves have always been looked upon as pointing, some of them prophetically, and others typically, to the same Person: Insomuch that, to this very Day, there is no Opinion that more strongly possesses the Minds of all that People than this: That the Messiah, whom God long since promised, and whom they suppose not yet to be come; shall in due Time come and appear in the World.

Now

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Now, whatever Difficulties may seem to arise in the Interpretation of all, or any of these, either typical or prophetical Passages, there is one very fair and reasonable Key to be made use of, which immediately opens and solves them all; which is, That the Kingdom of the Messiah, to which God requires all Mankind to be subject, is not a *temporal* but a *spiritual* Kingdom, *John* xviii. 36. and therefore that all such Passages as relate to him, and are not capable of a literal Interpretation, are to be understood in a spiritual Sense: Let us take, I say, but this one easy and rational Supposition with us, and the whole System of Types and Prophecies that occur in the Old Testament, concerning the Messiah, will easily and fairly be cleared up by it.

Thus, for Example; Although in a strict literal Sense it cannot be said, That our Blessed Saviour *sat upon the Throne of David, and upon his Kingdom, to order it*, *Is.* ix. 7. because he was no temporal Prince, as the other in his time had been; yet is it a sufficient fulfilling of this part of that Prophecy, that he, who in his human Nature was both the legal and natural Son of *David*, was appointed as a spiritual King for ever, to rule over the People of God. Thus also, though literally he might be called the *Seed of the Woman*, *Gen.* iii. 15. because he was conceived and born of a pure Virgin; yet his *bruising of the Serpent's Head and the Serpent's* bruising *his Heel*, is mystically to be understood of his *destroying the Works of the Devil*, *John* iii. 8. and of the Sufferings and Temptations wherewith the Devil assaulted him, and continues to do the like, more or less, to all Christians, who are the Members of his mystical Body *the Church*: And after the same manner all other the like Difficulties, that any where occur in the Prophecies concerning

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cerning the Messiah, may, I think, most easily and fairly be solved; as will abundantly appear to every one who seriously and impartially compares them all, with the History of our Blessed Saviour's Conception, Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven; together with the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon his Apostles and Disciples, and the consequent Propagation of the Gospel throughout all the known Parts of the World.

I need not therefore so far enlarge this Discourse as to go through the Particulars of these Types and Prophecies, and shew, how that very many of them are *literally*, the rest of them *spiritually*, and all of them *rationally*, accomplished in our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus: But, taking the Sum of the Argument together, I think it must have very great Force upon all unprejudiced Minds, if we thus put it into form.

A great Number of Types, Prefigurations and Prophecies, in several and distant Ages; some of them very plain, and all of them so pointing one way, as to beget in the whole Nation of the Jews, an Expectation of the coming of a Messiah; and lastly, all of them in due time fairly and coherently fulfilled in one and the same Person; all this, I say, could be the Effect of no other Wisdom or Foresight, but that of God; and consequently the Person in whom all these were fulfilled, ought to be looked upon as that very Messiah, who was promised, and accordingly sent by God into the World.

But all this is come to pass in the Person of our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus.

Therefore he is the Messiah or Christ, who was promised, and accordingly sent into the World by God. And if thus much is once granted, the Consequence

Sect. XVII. *by the Test of* R E A S O N. 59

Consequence will not be denied, that therefore that Religion, which was taught by himself in Person, and afterwards by those who were commissioned by him, is to be looked upon as coming from God and of Divine Authority; and thus much for the second Argument, whereby we prove the Christian Religion to be from God: I proceed to the

§ XVII. Third, which is drawn from the many *Miracles* that have been wrought for the Confirmation of it.

Whoever acknowledges God to be the first Cause and Creator of all Things, can mean no more by this Word *Nature*, when applied to created Beings, but only those Attributes and Qualifications, together with that Force and Energy, wherewith God has endowed them, and each of them: And thus it is the *Nature* of each thing, to do or to bear, whatever God has fitted and appointed it for.

How far the *Power of Nature* extends; or (in other Terms) what Attributes, Qualifications, Force or Energy, God who is Almighty, can, if he so pleases, bestow upon any created Being, I take it for granted that no Man knows: But how far the ordinary *Course of Nature* goes; that is to say, what is the State and Condition of Things, as far as they appear to us; what are the Common Effects of such and such Causes, and the usual Causes of such and such Effects; we all of us in a very great Measure do know, and every Day learn from our constant Experience and Observation.

If then I should see a Cause, duly applied, and not produce its usual Effect, or an Effect produced by a Cause in all appearance unsuitable to it, although I should not say this is altogether beyond

yond the *Power of Nature*, (which in one Sense is no other than the *Power of God*, to whom all things, that do not imply a Contradiction, are possible) yet I very well might say, this is beyond that *ordinary Course of Nature*, which by my constant Experience I find that God has established in the World; and such a thing I should call by the Name of a *Wonder*.

Again, If a rational Agent should bring about any Effect, in *outward Appearance* different from the ordinary Course of Nature; but yet (as I should apprehend) did perform this by some secret Method of applying such Causes, as in the common Nature of things were proper, and of Force sufficient for such a Production; this I should call the *Power of Art*.

But if such an Agent should *knowingly* and *designedly* do any thing, in order to produce any remarkable Effect; and accordingly should thereby produce it, without the least ground to suspect or imagine the Intervention of any such sort of *natural Cause*; such a Work as this so performed is what I call by the Name of a *Miracle*.

There may, I grant, be divers Cases, wherein a Man may very much doubt, and perhaps not be well able to determine, whether such or such a Work be a *Miracle*, or whether it be performed by the *Power of Art*: But other Instances again may be supposed, which, if appearing to be true in fact, no Man in his Wits can doubt to be really and truly *Miracles*. For Example; Let us suppose a Number of Men, some blind, others lame, maimed, sick of several sorts of Diseases, or plainly possessed by evil Spirits speaking within them, and violently distorting their Bodies with convulsive Motions; and that all these should be healed and cured of their several Maladies,

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ladies, by a Touch only, or barely by a Word speaking: could any Man be so extravagant as to say, that all this might possibly be performed by some *secret Art*, whereby a Man might be enabled to apply proper *natural Causes*, (in the common acceptation of that Expression) sufficient to the production of these Effects? Suppose five or seven Loaves, of a common bigness to be broken and distributed among four or five Thousand hungry Men, and to give them all a full Meal; and even the Fragments that remained, to be more in quantity than the Loaves themselves were: Or, lastly, to omit other Instances; Suppose one Man to be dead, and carrying to his Burial; another to have lain four Days in his Grave; and a third to have been crucified, and a Spear thrust into his very Entrails, and then to have lain in the Sepulchre to the third Day; and all of these to have been raised again, and actually restored to life: If a Man should allow the Facts to be true, and yet deny them to be *miraculous*, in the Sense that I have now explained the Word, the whole World certainly would look upon him to be most unreasonably obstinate.

If *Miracles* were really wrought and urged for the Confirmation of any Doctrine, which my Reason most plainly assured me implied a Contradiction, or were unworthy of God, and not to be reconciled with his known Attributes; such a Doctrine as this I could not believe, or give my Assent to, whatever were done or pretended to be done, or the establishing of it. For to give Assent at the same time to Contradictions, is absolutely impossible; and since our Reason assures us, that GOD, who is Eternal, Immortal, and absolutely perfect, is therefore altogether Unchangeable; it must follow, that whatever is contrary to any of his

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Attributes, must of necessity imply a Contradiction : And therefore when I had made the utmost Enquiry I could into such Miracles as these, if I were not able to detect them of *Art*, or *Imposture*, I could only look upon them as wrought by some evil Spirit, (*Deut. xiii. 3. Matt. xxiv. 24.*) and *permitted* by God, as a Trial of our Faith and Adherence to him. But if, upon the strictest Examination, the Doctrine, however above the reach of my Understanding to comprehend, should appear to have nothing *contradictory*, either in it or consequent from it, nor to contain or imply any thing, that were contrary to what I believe of God ; and the Miracles wrought for the Confirmation of it, were really and truly such, as they were pretended to be ; such a Doctrine as this I should look upon, as having all the Evidence of Divine Authority that could be desired : Nor could I apprehend, for what other Reason God, in such a Case as this, should work Miracles or cause them to be wrought, but only in order to beget in Men a firm belief of such Doctrine. If God by a Voice from Heaven should tell me, that such a Doctrine were true ; this would be no more but a *Miracle* ; and every other Miracle, in the Case supposed, would appear to me to be as full an Attestation from him, who is the Author and Controller of *Nature*, and without whose Power or particular Permission, the *Course* of it cannot at any time be altered.

Now take the whole System of Christian Doctrine, (not as it is altered or corrupted by this or that Sect or Party, but) as it is delivered to us pure and unmixed in the Scriptures ; and although there may be some things obscure and above the reach of our Understanding ; yet is there nothing in it that can be pretended to imply a *Contradiction* ; and

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the whole Frame of it is altogether worthy of God, and agreeable to his Attributes, I have already sufficiently shewn from the intrinsic Wisdom and Goodness that appears to be in it; and therefore since so many *Miracles* (in the proper Acceptation of that Word) were wrought by our Saviour Jesus Christ, his Apostles and Disciples, for the Confirmation of this Doctrine (as must be evident to every one who reads the four *Gospels* and the *Acts of the Apostles*) it unquestionably must follow, from what has been said, that the Doctrine itself is from God, and that he is the Author and approver of it.

And if any one shall question the Truth of these Matters of Fact, or doubt whether they were performed according as they are recorded in the History of the *New Testament*; for his Conviction I need only appeal to the many and great Sufferings of the Apostles and Disciples of Christ, (many of whom were *Eye-witnesses* of all that was done; and others received the Relation from their concurrent Testimony) who continually exposed themselves (as is most notorious and undenied) to all manner of Persecutions and Torments, and even to Death itself, only upon the Account of this same Testimony which they gave to the Resurrection of Christ, and all other the Miracles which were wrought by him and his Disciples for the Confirmation of that Doctrine and Religion which they taught and preached: And that such great Numbers of Men should readily undergo so many great and bitter Sufferings, without either inquiring into, or being well assured of, the Facts upon which all they suffered for entirely depended, is a thing in itself, altogether incredible.

Some, who are obstinate, will perhaps say, that if *Christianity* may be proved by Miracles, so may

Popery too: For the Papists, with great Assurance, make that Plea, even for those Doctrines and Practices in particular, whereby they are distinguished from other Christians: But (to say nothing yet a while of the monstrous Absurdities of *Popery*; which to an impartial Man must still appear very hard if not impossible to be digested whatever Proof we may suppose them to have for their *Miracles*; to say nothing of this, I say) between the Miracles that were wrought for the establishing of Christianity; and those which the Church of *Rome* alledges in behalf of her peculiar Tenets, there are these four very remarkable Differences:

First, The Christian Miracles are all of them grave and serious; the Popish ones generally are trifling and childish; as will abundantly appear to every one who compares the four *Gospels* and the *Acts of the Apostles*, with the *Legends* and Lives of the [pretended] Saints received in the Church of *Rome*.

Secondly, The Christian Miracles were immediately published to the World, as soon as they were wrought; whereby all Men had an Opportunity of making a full and impartial Inquiry into the Truth and Reality of them: Whereas the most considerable of the Popish ones have scarce ever been mentioned, until some Generations after the Time that they are pretended to have been performed.

Thirdly, The Christian Miracles were immediately and publickly attested by a sufficient Number of Witnesses; all of them Men of great Honesty and Simplicity; who neither would nor could have contrived such a Forgery; by which (if a Forgery it were) they could not have the least Prospect of Advantage, but altogether of great and grievous Sufferings. Whereas the Popish Miracles

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Miracles have seldom been published until long after the Death of the pretended Witnesses; and even those Witnesses such as were no Sufferers, but Gainers by their Testimony, and therefore, for that as well as other Reasons, the more liable to be suspected.

Fourthly, So convincing was the Evidence, which every where was offered for the Christian Miracles, that they almost universally gained Belief, even from Enemies as well as Friends; nor did any of those who antiently opposed our Religion, deny or gainsay the Matters of Fact; but only endeavoured to bring other Solutions for the Argument which the primitive Christians brought from that Topick; whereas the popish Miracles have been so far from gaining Credit (even in point of Fact) among their Adversaries; that their own sober and learned Men do not appear to believe the Truth of much the greatest Part of them.

Let these four things then (in themselves sufficiently notorious, and which my intended Brevity will not allow me to enlarge upon) be thoroughly and seriously considered; and it will soon appear that altho' the Argument from Miracles holds strongly and unanswerably in the behalf of Christianity; yet nothing can fairly be drawn from the like Topic for the Establishment of Popery.

§ XVIII. At last then I am come to the fourth Argument, whereby we prove that Christianity is from God; and that is drawn from the great *Success* which it met with at its first Appearance in the World.

I grant indeed that *Success alone* is not sufficient to prove the Truth or Goodness of any Cause whatsoever: It being beyond Contradiction notorious, that Error and Villainy have sometimes been very successful. But where a Religion has
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all other the Marks of Truth ; and has with great Success been propagated not only by Persons in an outward Appearance unfit for such a Work, and without the least Prospect of any temporal Encouragement ; but also in opposition to many grievous and bitter Persecutions, by the greatest Powers upon Earth, universally raised against it : The very *Success*, I say, of such a Religion as this, adds no small Weight to the other Arguments, that are brought to prove the Divine Authority of it ; and in such a Case, it may well be supposed that it is God who gives Men Power to perform a Work to which of themselves they are altogether unequal ; and when *vast Multitudes* every where not only forsake their old Religion in which they had been bred and embrace this which is but newly preached amongst them ; but also readily and willingly undergo Poverty, Banishment, Torments, and even Death itself for the sake of it ; it may well be looked upon as a good Argument, not only of the strong and clear Conviction which they have of the Truth of it, but also of a more than ordinary Support which they receive from the Hand of God, whereby they are enabled for its sake to bear such things as seem to surpass the very Strength of human Nature.

Now this is exactly the Case of Christianity : Its own intrinsic Wisdom and Goodness, together with the Prophecies accomplished, and Miracles wrought for its Establishment, do give it all the Marks of Truth, that can reasonably be desired ; it was at first preached by Men, both poor and illiterate, all of them except *St. Paul* ; and he too a Man but of a very small figure in Proportion to so great a Work : And so far was it from meeting with any temporal Encouragement in

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the World! that for about three hundred Years together it was always discountenanced, and often most inhumanly persecuted by the Civil Powers: Yet still the more it was persecuted the more it prevailed; and the Loss it sustained by the Death of every Martyr was doubly and trebly repaired by the new Converts that daily came over to it: Until at last, without any other visible Force but that of constant Preaching and holy Living, it triumphed over all the Opposition that was given to it, by the Learning of the Jewish Doctors and Heathen Philosophers; the Rage and Fury of the common People, and the Swords and Faggots, the Racks and Gibbets, and all other instruments of Death that every where were prepared for it by the Power of the Civil Magistrate: Nor could any thing stop its Progress until it got full and quiet Possession of all the vast Dominions of the Roman Empire, and carried its Conquests (how far indeed, for want of Records, we cannot certainly determine; but) very much farther, we are sure, than ever the Romans were able to extend their Power. Now although we grant Success alone is not sufficient to prove the Truth of any Religion; yet such wonderful Success as this, in Conjunction with the other Arguments that I have mentioned, we take to be an abundant Proof that *Christianity is from God, and consequently is the true Religion.*

§ XIX. But there are some Difficulties that certain Men do start upon this Occasion; to which it will here be expected that an Answer should be given.

First, Since God is no Respector of Persons, Acts x: 34. how comes it to pass that all Nations and People have not alike had the Gospel preached, and the Benefits of it thereby offered unto them? Why did not the Apostles, or others sent by them, travel

travel into every Part of the World alike? Examine the Account that Ecclesiastical History gives us of the Progress of Christianity, and you will find that though in a few Years it prevailed very much almost throughout the *Roman* Empire; yet many other Countries there were, that for divers Centuries heard little or nothing of it: Nor does it appear to this very Day to have been at all made known to the North-East Part of *Tartary* and great Part of *America*; and but very imperfectly in many vast Tracts of *India*, *China*, and the Countries thereunto near adjoining. Now if God Almighty designed Christianity for the common Benefit of all Mankind, and no Man can receive the Benefit of a Religion without some competent Knowledge of it; what imaginable Reason can be given why this Knowledge should not fairly be offered to every particular Man; and that in such a manner as to leave him no room to complain of any but himself: If by not embracing of the Religion, he fall short of the Reward that it proposes to its Votaries and Professors?

Upon this Objection the Adversaries of Christianity lay no small Weight; and many weak Christians at the first are puzzled and perplexed at it: I have therefore concealed no part of the Strength of it; and do think that the Force of it will be wholly taken away if we duly consider these two things:

First, That *it is no Argument in the least to prove, that God has not done a thing, because we are not able to assign a Reason why he has not done more.* Why did not he, whose Wisdom and Power are infinite, create ten thousand Millions of Worlds? (And if he had done so, the Question might still as well be asked, Why did he not create ten times as many more?) We know not. But will it

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it therefore follow, that he made never a one at all? Why did he not make this World much better than it is; and endow each particular Creature with greater Perfections than what they now have? (And whatever of this sort he had done, still the Question would recur, Why did he not do more?) Of this we are altogether ignorant: But will this, without more ado, overturn all the Arguments that are brought to prove, That the World was framed and fashioned by him? And because we know not why he did not think fit, either to send Christ sooner into the World, or cause Christianity to be taught, as particularly to each Man every where, as Children at School do learn their Lessons; Will this destroy the Force of all or any of those Proofs, that are brought for the Truth and Divine Authority of that Religion? As far as an Argument concludes well, it ought to be received: But to reject what is solidly and substantially proved, only because something beyond that cannot be proved, or is not true, is altogether absurd and unreasonable.

But still you will say, Why should God punish Men for not being Christians, if the Gospel has either not at all, or not sufficiently been preached or proposed to them? I answer, That this is not the Reason why he will punish such men: For (which is the

Second thing to be considered) no Truth can be more evident by its own Light than this, That God, who is infinitely just, good, and gracious, will never punish any Man for not doing an impossible thing; and therefore though we know not how far, or for what several Reasons he may punish those who never have had the Knowledge of the Gospel offered to them; yet to imagine that he will punish them, for not being Christians, is a palpable Mistake:

Mistake: It being altogether impossible for a Man to become a Christian, if no sufficient Instruction of that sort has ever been offered to him.

§ XX. Another Difficulty to be cleared up, is this; That many Men have in all Ages opposed Christianity, many have corrupted it; or great Disputes, at least, there have been, and still are, which are the true and genuine Doctrines and Precepts of it; in many Places where once it wholly prevailed, it has now lost its Ground, and given way to Mahometanism; and among those who profess it, vast Multitudes there are who lead their Lives almost in a direct opposition to it. Now, if the Evidence for this Religion has all along from the beginning, been so very great and clear, as I have endeavoured to represent it; how is it possible that so many Men did, and still do resist the Force of it, and chuse another and far worse Profession before it? How could it come to be thus adulterated, as we find it is? (For among the many contending and contrary Parties, all but one must, more or less, be Corruptors of that Christianity which in common they pretend to. And, lastly, If the Rewards it proposes, and Punishments it threatens, are so certain, as they must be, if the Religion itself be undoubtedly of Divine Authority; it seems to be beyond Imagination itself, that any one Man in his Wits should believe this, and yet continue to lead a wicked and ungodly Life.

In answer hereunto, let it be considered, That God having made Man a rational Creature, and endowed him with a Power of Choice; does not irresistably compel him to any thing, only *sets before him* Good and Evil, *Life and Death, Blessing and Cursing*, Deut. xxx. 19. with sufficient Motives

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to chuse the one, and reject the other ; but with full and free Liberty, at the same time, to do which of the two he pleases ; and therefore if never so many Men do oppose or persecute the true Religion, notwithstanding the most convincing Proofs that are offered in the behalf of it ; or having embraced it, do yet live contrary to the Rules and Precepts of it, or even again renounce or forsake it ; all this is only an Argument of their own Pride, Covetousness, Sensuality, or whatever else it is that they suffer to prevail in them in opposition to their Duty ; but makes nothing at all against Religion, which ought always to be judged of, by the direct proof and Evidence that is brought for it, and not barely by the Reception it meets with in the World ; especially if we consider how very often Men's Lust, Passions, and Prejudices are permitted to get almost an entire Ascendant over their Reason.

§ XXI. If it be here demanded, Why did not God at first create, and afterwards preserve Man in greater Perfection, as to his intellectual Powers, than it seems he has done ? Why does he not give him an understanding as well qualified to discern Truth from Error, and good from Evil, as a good Eye is to distinguish Light from Darkness ; and also a Will immutably fixt upon the former, and always averse to the latter ? For if this had been done, the Consequence would be, that every Man would most certainly embrace the true Religion as soon as it should be proposed to him ; and when he had once embraced it, would always retain and live according to it.

I answer, *First*, That whatever intellectual or other Perfections God might have given unto Mankind ; as long as they come short of being infinite, (of which no created Being is, I suppose,
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or can be capable) there would still be room for this same Question, *Why has not God given them greater Perfections?* For the greater Perfections a rational Creature is endowed with, the greater degree of Happiness is he capable of: And since it is natural for every such Creature to desire to be as happy as possible can be if the Will of the Almighty Creator is not to set bounds unto that Desire, and to be the Rule of it; a way is opened for a perpetual Expostulation of all the rational part of the Creation, against their Creator: *The Thing formed* may for ever say to him that formed it, *Why hast thou made me thus?* Rom. ix. 20. And Angels as well as Men may say to God, *Why hast thou not given us still a greater degree of Perfection, that so we might be able to attain to the like degree of Happiness?*

But, *Secondly*, although it is altogether inconsistent with God's infinite Goodness, that he should create any Sort of Beings; and without any Fault by them committed, should put them into a State of unavoidable Misery; yet, on the other hand, it is most certain, that he neither is nor can be a *Debtor* to any of his Creatures, beyond what he, by his own voluntary Promise, at any time thinks fit to make himself: And therefore whatever Portion of Good he is pleased to bestow on any of them, it is an Instance of his Bounty and Beneficence to the Work of his Hands: And as he who has received but one Talent, is accountable for no more but what he has received; so is he as truly obliged to be content with, and thankful for it, as any other that is entrusted with a greater Number.

And here let me a little expostulate this matter with those Men, who, by such sort of Demands and Objections as these, do presume to arraign and

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and call in question the infinite *Wisdom* and *Goodness* even of God himself. Of both these Attributes, as well as of his Almighty *Power*, he has given us abundant Evidence both in the Structure of the World, and the Revelation and Propagation of the Christian Religion: But, say some, the World is not as well contrived, nor the several Parts of it, and Beings that belong to it, as perfect as they might have been: And hence they would infer, either that it was not made by God at all, or that he is not as wise and good as we would represent him. And the like Objection they frame against Christianity; because Multitudes that profess it live contrary to it; and many Millions have gone off the Stage, and still continue to do so, without ever having had the least Knowledge or Instruction in it.

But what intolerable Arrogance is this, thus to deny, or even doubt of the Wisdom and Goodness of God, (for which such unanswerable Arguments are produced) only because our short and narrow Understanding is not able to fathom or comprehend them? Do we know the *utmost Design* that God has in framing of the *Universe*, and each and every Part thereof, with all and every the Creatures that are, or, for ought we know, may be in the several Regions of it, and the farthest Extent of that Subordination, which all these Creatures have one to another, in order to that Design? And if every created Being has Perfection sufficient for that end, for which God made it, is not this enough for that Station in which it is placed? No doubt but God, if he so pleased, might have made the craggy Hills and Mountains, most fruitful and delightful Plains; but if he has thought fit to have these great Unevennesses in the Earth,

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for the better supplying of the whole with Rain, Fountains and Rivers; dare we take upon us to find fault with his Workmanship? He might have caused the Earth to produce not only all sorts of Fruit and Corn, without any Tillage, but also Houses ready fitted for the Reception and Habitation of Man: But shall we grumble, because matters are so ordered that we cannot have these things without the Intervention of our own Care and Industry? He might have given rational Souls to the Brutes, and created Man with all the Perfections of an Angel; but if he has thought fit to make them just such as they are, that the Beasts may be the more servicable to Man, and Man undergo a Trial here, in order to his Reward or Punishment hereafter; ought not this rather to raise our Admiration of the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, than to move us in the least to call them in Question? And lastly, (to omit all other Instances) it was and is always in his Power to give every Man throughout the whole World, most full and perfect Information of all the Doctrines and Precepts of Christianity, together with the Grounds and Reasons of them: But he has not done so; and who can tell whether he intends, at the last Day, to call any Man to an Account for more than what he has received? That is to say, for the Abilities and Opportunities, which in his Life-time he had, of gaining Knowledge of the Truth, and putting that Knowledge into Practice, in that Place and Station wherein he in his Providence has thought fit to place him.

To conclude this Point: If Man will but allow that God is or may be very much wiser than himself, he will easily be content with those most pregnant Proofs he has so clearly given us, both
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of his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, as well as Power; and whatever comes to pass that human Reason is not able otherwise to account for, he will always believe it to be designed and directed by God to some good End, in order to the better and more regular Administration of the Universe; although we at present have no way of coming to the particular Knowledge of it. A thousand things may, with the greatest Justice and Prudence, be transacted and done by a Prince and his Council, of which every private Man, though of very good Understanding in his own proper Affairs, may yet, from the outward Appearance, be able to frame no competent Judgment; and for any of us to call in question the Wisdom or Goodness of God's Administration, (of which the Reasons are altogether beyond our Capacity) is not only very great Presumption, but altogether as foolish also and absurd, as if a dead Man should pass his Judgment on the Distinction of Sounds, or a Man born blind on the Difference of Light and Colours.

§ XXII. But the presumption of some Men goes yet farther, and demands, What Necessity there is of any Revealed Religion at all? Does not Reason, if duly attended to, most certainly inform us of the Being of God, together with his Attributes of Wisdom, Power, Justice and Goodness? And may we not from these Attributes as evidently infer that his Will also is, as far as we are concerned in it; that is to say, as far as it is either a Rule of Duty to us, or a Ground to hope for a Reward, if we obey; and to expect Punishment, in case we are disobedient? Read those Authors who have learnedly and judiciously handled these Subjects, and you will find the Truth and Authority of *Natural Religion* so fully

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demonstrated; the Duties of it, as they respect both God and Man, so clearly described, and their Obligation so evidently proved; as to require nothing more but Conformity and Obedience thereunto, to render Man as happy as he is capable of in this Life; and sufficiently to qualify him for whatever farther Happiness God hath been pleased to design for him in that which is to come: And all this from the Principles of Reason alone, and antecedent to any manner of Revelation. Since then the very utmost Design of Religion is to make Men happy here, and qualify them for Happiness in the Life to come; and all this may sufficiently be provided for by Reason alone, if every Man would but impartially follow it; why should we imagine that God hath made any supernatural Revelation of Religion at all, since the utmost End that he can be supposed thereby to propose to himself, may as well be accomplished by every Man's attending to that Light of Reason, which his Creator hath implanted in his very Nature?

But suppose we were altogether unable to discover the least Necessity of Revelation; would it follow from hence that therefore there neither is, nor can be any such Thing? Whether God hath been ever pleased to make any supernatural Revelation of himself or his Will, is a Question of *Faet*; and if a *Faet* be sufficiently proved by proper Arguments, that is to say, by the Testimony of unexceptionable Witnesses, is it reasonable for any Man to say, that the thing is not so, only because he cannot tell why it should be so? And may not God in his infinite Wisdom see very just Causes for the doing of many things, of which we may be altogether ignorant? Whosoever doth but a little consider both the Clearness and Boundless-

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ness of God's Knowledge, and compare it with the Darkness and Narrowness of Man's Understanding, can never sure have the Confidence to make such sort of Objections as these.

However, let us yield a little to debate this matter with the Objectors. There is no doubt to be made but God, if he had so pleased, might much farther have enlightened every Man's natural Understanding than what he hath done, and thereby alone, without any supernatural Revelation, have given them such an Insight into Things divine, as that their Reason alone might have been a sufficient Rule both of Faith and Practice to them. But the Question is not at present, *What God might have done, but what he actually hath done*; and if he hath thought fit to superadd to *Reason* another and farther Rule of *Revelation*, will any Man venture to say that he hath not sufficient Authority for so doing?

But where is the *Necessity*, say they, of Revelation, since God might have governed the whole World as it is manifest he hath done a great part of it, without it? And shall we suppose the all-wise God to have done any thing that is *unnecessary*, or (in other terms) in vain?

I answer, That if by *Necessity* here is meant an *absolute and unavoidable Necessity*, it is most evident that God (whose freedom of Action is essential to his infinite Perfection) has done very many things without any such *Necessity* as this incumbent on him: Nor can any other Account be given, why he made the World, and all the several sorts of Beings that are in it, and endowed them severally with such various Properties and Powers as are found to be in them? But that it was his own Good-will and Pleasure so to do; and that in order to such Ends and Purposes, as
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he, in his infinite Wisdom, thought fit to lay down and establish.

But if by *Necessity*, no more is meant but only a great *Congruity* and Aptitude, in order to the bringing about some wise and good End, then, in answer to the Question proposed, I return these following things:

First, It is not to be doubted, but that God may have many wise and great Ends to accomplish; and may adapt the most proper means to each several End, far beyond what we poor shallow Mortals are able (at least while we are in this Life) to comprehend. Although therefore we could see no manner of *Necessity* for Revelation, in order to any End that we can imagine, it will not follow but that God may know it to be highly necessary, and by much the most proper means for the bringing to Effect certain Designs of his own, which in themselves are most wise and good; although as yet perhaps altogether unknown, or unfathomable to us.

Secondly, As far as the Ends which God hath proposed to himself are made known to us, or we are able to dive into them, it evidently appears, that those several Revelations, which he hath been pleased to make of himself and of his Will to the World, were in their own nature very proper, (and in that Sense *necessary*) in order to the Accomplishment of them.

All sober Men, who own that there is a God, allow him at the same time, to be infinitely *Wise*, *Good* and *Just*; and therefore whatever he does, in pursuance of any *one* of these Attributes, must always be supposed to be fully consistent with the *other two*.

From the Relation also that rational Creatures bear both to God, and to each other; it is granted that

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that there arise certain unchangeable Rules, or Measures of Moral Good and Evil, which we call *Natural Laws*.

Whatever is morally evil God cannot do because it is directly contrary to his very Nature and essential Attributes.

Now God having made Man a rational as well as sensitive Creature, and given him an immortal Soul, as well as mortal Body, one End or Design, which his Wisdom and Goodness are always supposed to have had in the Creation of such a Being, was to put him into a Capacity of being eternally happy in another Life, after this shall have an End.

One essential Part of the Happiness of a rational Creature, as such, necessarily consists in the Satisfaction that arises from his having voluntarily given Obedience to such *natural Laws*, or *unchangeable Rules of Good*, as are above mentioned; for where Reason exerts itself, and this Satisfaction is wanting, Remorse of Conscience must arise, which is always destructive of Happiness.

And if a rational Creature obstinately continues in Disobedience to those Laws, without any true Repentance or Amendment, it would be contrary to God's essential *Justice* to make such a Creature eternally happy, if we could suppose him, while he so continued, to be capable of it.

Granting then what both Sides agree in, That God at first sent Man into this World as a Candidate for eternal Happiness, to be obtained by his Obedience to these same Laws; and endowed him with Reason and Understanding sufficient to make a full Discovery of them; if all the Revelations that he hath thought fit to make, should appear only to be *consistent* with this Design; even this alone were sufficient abundantly to justify him
(whose

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(whose Authority over his Creatures hath no other Limits but his own Goodness) in the making of them.

Let all the Revelations then that God hath made (as they are recorded both in the Old and New Testament) be strictly examined and enquired into; and what even seeming *Inconsistency* can there be found between any of them, and any one of those *natural* and *unchangeable* Laws, which by Reason we are able to discover?

But you will say, that there are many things in the *Old* and some in the *New Testament*, which though not *inconsistent with*, yet are altogether *superadded* to the *Natural Laws*: I grant it, but then let it be considered,

First, That God hath an undoubted Authority to lay what *positive Injunctions* he thinks fit upon his own Creatures: Nor can such *Injunctions* be any other way made known unto us than by Revelation.

Secondly, That when once such *Injunctions* are made known, our Obedience to them becomes a Duty, by virtue of that general Sanction of the natural Law, That *God is to be obeyed in all things*.

Thirdly, That most, if not all, of those *positive Injunctions*, which God hath at any Time been pleased to lay on Men, have always been designed, and in their own nature fit, for the better Enforcement of the Duties of the *natural Law*; either by awakening them into a more awful Apprehension of the Divine Majesty, or being as it were a Fence about certain Precepts of the *natural Law*, to keep them at the greater Distance from the Transgression of them.

Fourthly, That a very great and most material (that is to say, all that we call the moral) Part of whatever Revelation God hath been pleased to make,

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make, is no more than a clear and full Declaration of those very Duties, which by the *natural Law* we are obliged to perform; and consequently no small Help to our Reason; which, wherever this Light of Revelation hath been wanting, hath not been sufficient to keep Men from the most great and gross Absurdities in matters that relate to God, and Religion.

And lastly, Whereas it is very hard to suppose, that such a Creature as Man should take much Pains, and encounter many Difficulties in the Discharge of his Duty, unless he were awed on the one hand by the Fear of Punishment; and on the other, encouraged by the Hope of some Assistance here, and a sufficient Reward hereafter; and the Doctrines of God's punishing the wicked, and both assisting and rewarding of good Men, are but somewhat obscurely suggested to us by Reason alone: It certainly must be allowed as highly agreeable to God's Design in the Creation of Mankind, that these things should be more clearly and fully made known unto us by Revelation; thereby to work the more effectually both upon our Hopes and our Fears, in order to keep us up close to our Duty, notwithstanding the many Difficulties and Discouragements which we often meet with in the Performance of it.

True, it may be you will say, that God hath sufficient Power and Authority, not only by Revelation to assist our Reason; but also by the same Means to make known Truths, and lay positive Injunctions on us in Matters of Religion, beyond what Reason of itself could possibly discover; may well enough be granted; but still the Difficulty remains, that it will be asked, Why this Revelation (if any such there hath been) hath not from time to time been universally made to all Mankind;

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kind; but always hath, and still is confined to so
small a Number?

But this Question plainly supposes the *Necessity*
of Revelation in the Sense that we maintain it;
that is to say, the great Congruity and Usefulness
of it; and demands only why the Extent of it is
not universal to each particular Man. To which
having already given, I think, a sufficient Answer,
I shall not tire the Reader with an unnecessary Re-
petition of it.

Only this I think I may very well add, that it is
at least highly probable, that almost all the Knowledge
which we have in the World even of natural Law and
Religion is wholly owing to Revelation. As in Geo-
metry (for Example) a most difficult Theorem when
it is once demonstrated, is so plain to the Reason of
every Man who understands the Demonstration, that
every Man is very apt to think that he could himself
have found it out; and yet thousands of good Geo-
metricians there are, and have been, who never
would [of themselves] have found out the Demon-
strations of that Science, or have had any Notion
of them, if they had not been taught by others; so
although the Doctrines and Rules of *natural Law*
and Religion are, in my Opinion, demonstrably de-
duzive from such Principles as every Man in his
Wits must allow to be true; yet, supposing the Rea-
son of Mankind to be just the same as now it is, it is
very plain that few, or perhaps none, would have
made any Deduction, or at least have gone very far
in it, if the Minds of some Men had not been en-
lightened by Revelation; and that Light in a greater
or less Measure derived down unto others.

When God first made Man he did not leave him
only to gather what Knowledge he could by the
Strength of his own Reason, from the Works of
the

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the Creation and the Order and Course of Nature; but gave him what Instruction was farther necessary by immediate Revelation, *Gen. i. 28. &c.* whereby *Adam* was also enabled to teach and instruct, and propagate Knowledge amongst his Posterity.

This way of teaching us by immediate Revelation God was pleased, even after the Fall of Man, in some Measure to continue; as appears in the Account which the Holy Scripture gives us of *Cain* and *Abel*, *Noah*, *Abraham*, *Joseph*, *Moses* and the Prophets; and after some Intermision, to renew the same by *Jesus Christ* and his Apostles.

And that some Footsteps of *some* of these Revelations [at least] did, almost as universally as Mankind, spread themselves, and for a very long time remain throughout the whole World, appears I think most plainly from that Custom of worshipping the Deity by *Sacrifices*, which every where was retained amongst all Nations, as far as we have any Account of them in ancient History, whether true or fabulous. Of which universal Custom, every where prevailing amongst the most distant People, no rational account can be given from any of the Principles of *Natural Religion*; nor indeed any other but this one (that will bear the utmost Test) *viz.* that it was first immediately taught unto Man by God himself; and then derived down and propagated from one Generation to another.

For to say nothing of *Cain* and *Abel*, (*Gen. iv. 3, 4.*) or what passed before the Flood; presently after it we find *Noah* (who had an immediate Intercourse with God by Revelation) *building an Altar*, and *offering Burnt-offering upon it*, *Gen. viii. 20.* and what he thus did himself, it cannot be doubted but he taught his Children also to do:

Not

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Not to mention *Abraham*; from whom not only the *Ismaelites* and *Israelites* (who were very numerous) but also several other Nations sprang, by those Children which his last Wife *Keturah* bare unto him, *Gen. xxv. 2.*

That some Knowledge also of the Religion of *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses,* and the *Israelites*, (which came to them by Revelation) must needs be propagated amongst the neighbouring Nations, where they dwelt, or any of them travelled; and particularly amongst the *Egyptians* and *Phenicians* (from whence it is notorious that all the *Grecian* Learning was derived) is what no one surely will deny; that the *Israelitish* Religion became farther known in the World by the several Conquests, Dispersions, and Captivities of that People, by the Translation of their Scriptures into the *Greek* Tongue (very generally understood) about three hundred Years before the coming of Christ, is very natural to believe. And *Lastly*, that Christianity was in a few Years far and near propagated in the World, is as well known as any thing in History.

Now wherever any Knowledge of the things in the above-mentioned Revelations or any of them was propagated or received; notwithstanding the many Errors, Corruptions and Fables, which were therein mixed, yet still it served as a Ferment to stir up natural Conscience, and preserve some Sense of Religion amongst those Nations. And on the contrary, wherever we find a People to have lost all Sense of Revelation and revealed Truths, scarce any Footsteps even of natural Religion are to be found amongst them.

Thus, for Example, it is notorious that the ancient fabulous Theology, received by the *Grecians*, and from thence derived to the *Romans*, was

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in a great Measure a Corruption of, together with many Additions to some Part of those Revelations, which are contained in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, for the Proof of which we need go no farther than the History of the Creation and Deluge, as it is related in the very beginning of *Ovid's Metamorphosis*; and how great a Sense of Religion and Conscience, the Apprehension of these and such like Things, kept up in both those People, is too well known from their Histories to need any farther Proof here. And after that Christianity began to be made known throughout the *Roman Empire*; it is remarkable that even the Heathen Writers exalted both Piety and Morality, to a higher and more spiritual Degree, than any of their Predecessors (though Men of as great Parts and Learning) had ever done before them: Which can probably be attributed to no other Cause but the Acquaintance which they had with some of the Notions of the Gospel.

On the contrary, they who have travelled into those Countries, where the ancient Natives have lost all Sense or Apprehension of any such Thing as Revelation, do assure us, that they find among them so very little Sign of any Worship of God, or Footstep even of natural Religion, that it is at least very doubtful whether they have any manner of Sense of God or Religion at all; of which (to omit others) the People called *Hottentots* at the *Cape of Good Hope*, are a very remarkable Instance.

I shall close my Answer to all the foregoing Objections with this one Consideration, which I take to be abundantly sufficient to surmount all the Difficulties that are or can be contained in them; namely, that not only Revelation, but in a great Measure even Reason also, from the unequal Distribution of Good and Evil in this Life, assure

us that there is a Life to come, and a great Day of Account in which Rewards and Punishments shall be most exactly dispensed; and all the [seeming Inequalities] of this World so thoroughly rectified and made even, that Virtue which hath sometimes here been oppressed shall have no farther Reason to complain, or bemoan itself; nor prosperous Vice any longer ground to triumph and rejoice. Then it shall appear to all the rational part of the Creation, that the *Judge of all the Earth* doth nothing but what is right, Gen. xviii. 25. And as the *good and faithful Servant* (Matt. xxv. 21.) shall be most amply rewarded; so the *wicked and slothful one* (ver. 26.) shall be sufficiently punished; not for that he had but *one Talent* (ver. 15.) committed to him, or *Ability* to manage no more, (neither of which are laid to his Charge as a Fault) but purely and only because he did not *put his Lord's Money to the Exchangers*, ver. 27. that is to say, did not make that due Improvement of the Stock, with which he was entrusted, that he might and ought to have done. Then *that Servant which knew his Lord's Will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his Will, shall be beaten with many Stripes: But he that knew not, and did commit Things* [in themselves] *worthy of Stripes, shall be beaten with few Stripes; for unto whomsoever much is given, of him* [alone] *shall much be required*, Luke xii. 47, 48. And as many as have sinned without [the Revealed] Law [of God] shall also perish without [being judged by that] Law; and as many as have sinned in the Law, shall be judged by the Law, Rom. ii. 12. For when the Gentiles, which have not the [Revealed] Law, do by [the Light of] nature the Things contained in the Law, these having not the [Revealed] Law, are a Law unto themselves, ver. 14.

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This World is but a short Prelude to that vast Eternity that is to follow; and we being at present on the obscure side of the Curtain, cannot make a full and perfect Discovery of what is yet in a great measure concealed on the other side of it. But from the infinite Wisdom, Justice and Goodness of God, we may with all assurance conclude, that whenever the Scene shall be opened, and a full Discovery made to us of all that is to come, as far as we are concerned in the Knowledge of it, all Things will appear so right and equitable, and what comes after so exactly fitted to whatever hath gone before, that without the least Scruple, Doubt or Suspicion, we shall all with one accord cry out, that *the Judgments of the Lord are true and Righteous altogether*, Psal. xix. 9.

§ XXIII. But it may be objected, That there are very sufficient Arguments to prove, that the Jewish Religion was from God; and yet we maintain that it is superseded by Christianity; How then do we know, but that there is some other Religion, that comes into the Place of the Christian; as the Christian has done into that of the Jewish? This indeed is the Pretence of the Mahometans; but the answer to it is very easy.

Whatsoever Things are of moral and eternal Goodness; whatsoever things are in their own nature *honest, just, pure and lovely*, Phil. iv. 8. are for ever the same, and unchangeable, and are all transmitted from Judaism into Christianity; and there contained in the highest degree of Perfection. But for such as are only of positive Institution, as they are always supposed to be in themselves alterable by the same Authority that first appointed them, so it is no less than impos-

fible that they should be all the same in the Christian, as they were in the Jewish Religion. The *Israelites*, for Example, who lived within a small Tract of Ground, were obliged by their Law to perform several Acts of Obedience, and Worship, at certain Times of the Year, at no other place but the House of God; which for many Years was the Temple of *Jerusalem*, where they who lived at the remoter Parts of the Earth, could not possibly give their Attendance: And this alone (to omit many other Considerations) is enough to shew, that the positive Part of the Mosaick Law, was only intended for that one People; and that too no longer than they should remain distinct and separate from all other Nations. Moreover, in all the Revelations that God was pleased to make of himself, even from the very time of the Fall of Man, he still thought fit to give plain Intimations of farther Discoveries that were to be made of his Will to the World: As appears by the Promises made by him, That *the Seed of the Woman should bruise the Serpent's Head*, Gen. iii. 15. That *in the Seed of Abraham all the Nations of the Earth should be blessed*, Gen. xxii. 18. That *Shilo should come, and unto him should the gathering of the People be*, ch. xlix. 10. That *God would raise up unto his People a Prophet, like unto Moses, whom they should hear*, Deut. xviii. 15, 18. And in a word, from all these Predictions in the Old Testament, which the Jews, as well as Christians, always did, and still do understand to foretel the coming of the Messiah; who was to *tell them all Things*, John iv. 25. Whereas in all that Declaration of his Will, which in *these last Days* God has been pleased to make unto the World by his Son, Heb. i. 2. there is not the least Suggestion or Intimation of any new or farther

farther Revelation of his Will to be made; but altogether the contrary: As abundantly appears from many Passages in the New Testament; particularly from the Promise of our Blessed Saviour, to be with his Disciples *alway even unto the end of the World*, Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.) in the preaching of the Gospel, which he had commanded them to *teach all Nations*; and above all, from the frequent Assurance he has given us, both by himself and his Apostles, that all who shall receive his Doctrine, and conform themselves to it, shall *inherit eternal Life*, Mark xvi. 15, 16. John iii. 15, 16. which being the utmost Reward that Man is capable of receiving, shews, that that Obedience, to which this reward is annexed, is the utmost that God Almighty does or ever will require, from any Man whatsoever. So that if once we allow the Christian Religion to be from God, (as I think the Proofs brought for it are beyond all imaginable Exceptions) we must of necessity also own, that this is the last Revelation of himself, or his Will, that ever he designs to make to the World, and consequently that all Pretences to new and farther Discoveries in Religion, can be no better than Imposture or Delusion.

§ XXIV. I proceed to the third Question; namely, *Why we are Protestants and not Papists; of the Reformed rather than the Roman Religion?*

Whatsoever Controversies have been raised, or different Opinions at any time maintained in the World, concerning the divine Inspiration, Authority, Perfection, Interpretation, or Perspicuity of the Holy Scriptures; yet all who have ever professed Christianity with the least degree of Sobriety (whether Papists or Protestants, or of what other Denomination soever they have been) have constantly
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and fully agreed in this ; that whatever Doctrines or Rules of Life are clearly and plainly taught and contained in those sacred Writings ; and are altogether agreeable to the main Tenor and Design of them ; ought always to be received as true and obligatory to every Man as far as he has the Opportunity of coming to the Knowledge of them. Now the whole and intire Religion of a Protestant is no more but this ; to believe and profess the Articles of the Apostles Creed, to be duly baptized with Water according to Christ's Institution, to lead a holy and virtuous Life in the diligent Practice of the Duties of Piety and Morality, frequently to participate of that holy Ordinance of Bread and Wine, which takes its Name from Christ's appointing it at his last Supper ; and lastly, to give all due Obedience to that lawful Authority both civil and ecclesiastical, which, in the Course of God's Providence, is placed over him ; nor does any sober Protestant, that I know of, require more than this, as an essential part of Religion, or absolutely necessary to the Salvation of any Christian ; and that all this is clearly, plainly, and beyond all Contradiction, contained and taught in the Holy Scriptures, and altogether agreeable to the main Tenor and Design of them, is not only most evident to every one who reads them ; but also fully and freely owned and acknowledged by all those who are of the Church of *Rome* ; which therefore we take to be a very sufficient Reason why we are of the Protestant Religion. For whatever Objection may be pretended against the *Name* Protestant, as being new and unheard-of till of late Years ; yet nothing of that Nature can be more evident than that the *Religion* which we profess, as I have but now described it, is as antient as
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the first Propagation of the Gospel by the Apostles; being all of it most plainly contained in the Holy Scriptures.

It may perhaps be objected that the Thirty Nine Articles, received by our Church, are expressly called *Articles of Religion*; and the *Confessions*, by other Protestant Churches published, are usually stiled *Confessions of Faith*: Now that these *Articles* and *Confessions* do all of them contain much more than what I have but now set down as the whole Religion of a Protestant, is evident, and accordingly acknowledged: and if so, the Consequence must necessarily be, that the Faith or Religion of a Protestant includes a great deal more than what I have described to be in it.

To this the Answer will not be difficult if we consider that these Words *Faith* and *Religion* are sometimes taken in a larger, and sometimes in a more contracted and limited Signification; sometimes they are put to signify that whole System of Doctrine which is authentickly received by any Church; tho' not all of it, as absolutely necessary to Church-Communion or eternal Salvation; yet as sound and true, and altogether agreeable to the Holy Scriptures, or whatever Rule of Faith or Religion is received, and owned by them: And in this Acceptation of the Words, the Faith or Religion of a Protestant may be said to contain more than what I have mentioned to be in it: But these same Words, as they are implied, tho' not expressed in my Text, are to be understood in the strictest Signification, to denote no more than what is ordinarily necessary to the Salvation of a Christian. My Text requires no more from us, but that we should be *ready to give an Answer to every Man that asketh us a Reason of the Hope that is in us*; or in other Terms, why we hope to be saved

saved in and by that Faith and Religion which we profess? But to give our Reasons why we believe some other Doctrines also to be *true*, (although we do not look upon them as ordinarily necessary to Salvation) however prudent and proper upon many Occasions it may be, is yet beyond the Design of what my Text prescribes; Now, if we take the Words *Faith* and *Religion* in this Sense, for no more but what we esteem to be ordinarily necessary to the Salvation of every Christian; there is no sober Protestant, that I know of, who extends his *Faith* or *Religion* beyond those Bounds within which I have but now described it; that is to say, requires any more to be explicitly believed or practised, in order to the eternal Salvation of a Christian than those several Things that I have mentioned.

But still a part of the Question continues unanswered; nor will it be thought sufficient barely for us to shew, why we embrace our own Religion: But it will farther be expected that we should give our Reasons for refusing to join with the Church of *Rome*, in the Profession or Practice of what they, beyond this, would expect and require from us.

For the clearing up therefore of what remains we must take notice that the Difference between us and the Church of *Rome*, does not consist in this, that they deny any thing to be ordinarily necessary to Salvation, which we affirm so to be, excepting only the Cup in the Holy Communion: But the great Difference between us lies in this, That in one Instance they have deprived the People of something, which by Christ's own appointment (as we apprehend) every Christian, that comes to Years of Understanding, ought to partake of; I mean the Cup in the Holy Communion. And in divers other Instances they have added to the Christian

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stian Religion, sundry Doctrines and Practices to be received by every one who is in Communion with them; which Doctrines and Practices we look on not only to be unnecessary, (for then perhaps we might in some Things, for Peace sake, comply with them) but to be false and unlawful; and therefore such as with a good Conscience we cannot profess, or join with them in: And if we can make this our Allegation good, it is a sufficient Reason why we neither are nor will be Papists; and so compleats our Answer to this third Question.

To come to the Matter then in very few Words. If Christ's own Appointment be a sufficient ground for that Obligation that lies upon all Christians to partake (as they become capable) of the Holy Communion, (which no sober Man of the Church of *Rome* ever yet, I believe, denied;) this holds altogether as strongly for drinking of the Cup, as it does for eating of the Bread. If that Doctrine which is directly contrary to the universal Sense and Reason of all Mankind, and to divers very plain Passages of Holy Scripture; and relies only and entirely upon a pretended literal Interpretation of one single form of Expression, (which, if it be once admitted, will as well prove our Blessed Saviour to be, in a literal Sense also, a *Vine*, a *Rock*, and a *Door*; with many other such Absurdities) if such a Doctrine as this, I say, may well be looked upon as false; then the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, as stated by the Council of *Trent*, cannot justly be received as true, and with it the Sacrifice of the Mass, and Worship of the Host, both which entirely rely upon this Doctrine, must also fall to the Ground. If we must *worship the Lord our God,*
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and serve him only, as our Saviour expressly says, *Matth. iv. 10* and if the first and second Commandments have still the same Meaning, and are of the same Obligation to us under the Gospel, as they were unto the *Israelites* under the Mosaick Dispensation; then the Invocation and Worship of Saints, Images and Relicks, as prescribed and practised in the Church of *Rome*, must of necessity be not only unlawful, but in a very high degree provoking unto God, who has declared himself to be a *jealous God*. The Time would fail me to speak of the Pope's Claim of Supremacy, his or his Churches pretended infallibility, Purgatory, Indulgences, Masses for the Dead, Private Masses, Auricular Confession, Penance and Satisfaction for Sins, Merits, Works of Supererogation, Pilgrimages, and all the long Train of Errors, and unlawful or unwarrantable Practices, which under the Name and Pretence of *Apostolick and Ecclesiastical Traditions, Observation and Constitutions of the Church*, are imposed upon the Members of that Communion; and must, under the Penalty of *Anathema*, be owned and approved of by them: All which Things, being seriously weighed and considered, we cannot but conclude, that as we have sufficient ground for most heartily embracing the Christian Religion, as it is in all Protestant Churches generally professed and declared to be necessary to Salvation, so have we abundant Reason, for the rejecting all those Additions which the Church of *Rome* has made to it, or Alterations in it; and consequently for refusing to join with that Church (as long as it continues thus corrupted) in religious Worship or Communion. And thus I have at last done with the

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the third Question Proposed ; namely, *Why we are Protestants, and neither are nor will be Papists?*

§ XXV. The fourth Question yet remains ; namely, *Why we are Protestants of the Established Church, and not of any Party that dissents or divides from her?* To which, I think, a fair and satisfactory Answer may in very few Words be given.

Whatever all Sober Protestants (I might add also and divers learned Papists) do maintain to be necessary to the Salvation of a Christian ; we can shew it all fully and freely to be had and enjoyed in our Church. We believe and profess the true Faith, as delivered in the Creed ; we are all received into the Church by Baptism ; we are taught to lead holy and virtuous Lives ; no part of Christ's Institution is omitted in the Administration of the Holy Communion ; we have Governors, both Ecclesiastical and Civil, lawfully set over us, to whom we are required to give Obedience so far, and no farther than as the Law of God prescribes ; Nor does any sober Protestant, as I have already said, require any more than this, as an essential Part of Religion, or of absolute necessity to our everlasting Happiness.

Again, Some Things may perhaps be esteemed as profitable in order to Salvation, although they cannot be reckoned to be of absolute necessity : And whatever there is or may be of this sort, may as fully and beneficially be enjoyed amongst us, as in any Society of Christians whatsoever : He, who is a Member of our Church, may read the Holy Scriptures and other good Books, attend the Worship of God both publicly and privately, hear Sermons, keep Days of Fasting or Abstinence, and do every thing else that any way tends to his Soul's Health : And this as much
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and as often as he pleases, or can any way conduce to his spiritual or eternal Welfare.

Nor is there any thing prescribed in or required, by our Church, that is any way destructive of Salvation, or in the least a hinderance to it. Nothing but Sin can any way be a bar to the Salvation of him that professes Christianity; nor can any thing be reckoned as a *Sin*, 1 John iii. 4. except it be either expressly or by good consequence, a *Transgression of the Law* of God; and *where no Law is, there is no Transgression*, Rom. iv. 15. Now however some of our Ceremonies or Ecclesiastical Constitutions may not be altogether agreeable to the Fancies or Desires of those who refuse them, and whatever other Objections are or may be artificially contrived against them; yet still there is not any one Thing required to be performed by any Member of our Communion, that can be proved to be *contrary to any of God's Laws*, or therefore can justly be condemned as any way destructive of Salvation.

Now wherever a Church is by Law established, in which all things any way necessary or profitable to Salvation may fully and freely be had and enjoyed, and nothing at all destructive of Salvation is imposed upon any Man: From such a Church as this, no Man ought to separate: and every one that lives within the Precincts of it, ought constantly to continue in its Communion. And although there may be some Things in its Constitution that are not so agreeable to his particular relish; yet as long as he can without Sin, and therefore with a good Conscience, conform to them, he ought not on the Score of any such Things as these, either to break the Unity, or disturb the Peace of the Church, or refuse his Obedience to
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SECT. XXVI. *by the Test of* REASON. 97

lawful Authority : And this I take to be a sufficient and satisfactory Answer to this fourth and last Question.

§ XXVI. But there are two Difficulties that arise upon the whole, which I must endeavour to clear up before I conclude.

First then, it will perhaps be objected by those of the Church of *Rome*, that however fair and well put together, all these Arguments, brought for the Proof of our Religion, may, at the first View, appear to be ; yet, when the Strength of them comes to be strictly examined, they will at best be found to be no more but *probable*, and far short of *Infallibility* : Now the highest *Probability*, say they, still includes and implies some small Degree, at least of *Uncertainty* ; and consequently cannot be a Ground sufficiently firm, on which a Man may venture his eternal Salvation ; and for this Reason they decry all other Men's Persuasion in Religion but their own, which they say is supported by the *Infallibility* of their Church ; and therefore is beyond even the Possibility of failing.

But would these Men have us build our Faith upon the Infallibility of their Church, without any Proof at all brought for it ; or have they sufficient Arguments to convince and satisfy us of the Truth and Reality of such Infallibility ? The former of these is altogether absurd ; nor do they demand so foolish and unreasonable a Thing from us : If then they undertake first to bring sufficient Proof of their Infallibility, before they would have us receive or acknowledge it, I demand farther, is this same Proof, in itself, infallible or not ? If not, then what are we the better for the pretended Infallibility of a Church, which has not infallible Arguments to support it ? But if their Proof be *in itself* infallible, it will follow

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that there is an Infallibility antecedent to that of the Church: And why may we not suppose, that the Truth of Religion may thereby be proved as well antecedently to the Infallibility of the Church, as the Infallibility of the Church antecedently to the Truth of Religion.

Again, whatever Arguments they offer for the Proof of their pretended Infallibility, must be, and accordingly are always drawn either from Reason, or Scripture, or both in conjunction together; from which same Fountains we also directly bring our Proofs for the establishing of the Truth of our Religion: Now, let their Arguments for their Infallibility, and ours for our Religion, be well compared the one with the other; and it will soon appear to every impartial Man, that those, which we bring immediately in the behalf of Religion, are by much the most conclusive of the two. Nor can they of the Church of *Rome* pretend to offer one single Word in behalf of their Infallibility; but upon a Supposition that the Being of God, and the Truth of Christianity are first sufficiently established upon the Proofs which are common, both to us and them: So that whatever Strength they may fancy to be in their Arguments for the Infallibility of their Church, it must all of necessity depend upon those that are, antecedently thereto, brought for the establishing of Religion, and Christianity in general: From whence these two Consequences must unavoidably follow: *First*, That no Man's Belief of Religion and Christianity in the general can justly in the least depend upon the supposed Infallibility of the Church; and, *Secondly*, That if from Reason and Scripture, as good or better Arguments may be immediately had for the establishing of the particular Doctrines of Christianity, than are brought for the

Proof

Sect. XXVI. *by the Test of* R E A S O N. 99

Proof of this pretended Infallibility; we may as well, nay we had much better receive such particular Doctrines upon the Proof that so may be brought for them, than endeavour to lay the Stress of them upon such an Infallibility, as cannot be so well proved as they themselves may be without it. And indeed when it is considered how much the Writers of the Church of *Rome* are puzzled, either where to place their pretended Infallibility, or how to make any sort of Proof of it, it may well amaze every sober Man to find them with so much Confidence insisting upon a Thing, which, on a sober Examination, appears to be no better than a Fiction or Hypothesis, contrived to serve a Turn, and void of all satisfactory Proof or Reality.

But it is not enough, that we can so abundantly retort this Objection upon the Church of *Rome*; for notwithstanding this, the Difficulty still remains and requires another kind of Solution: In order whereunto, it must indeed be freely granted, that in all matters of great Moment and Consequence (where we suppose every Man willing to run as little Hazard as possibly may be) if strict and *infallible Certainty* can be obtained, no Man ought to stop short of it, or content himself with any degree of *bare Probability*, how great soever it may appear to be. But let us suppose, either that the Matter in debate will not admit, or that the Person who makes the Enquiry, is incapable of this sort of absolute Certainty: What must be done in such a Case as this? A Man, for Example, expects in all probability to be ruined, if he does not take a Journey of a hundred Miles: Now, because it cannot be mathematically demonstrated to him that he shall come safe to the Place whither he would travel; that he shall neither break his Bones by a Fall from his Horse, nor be drowned in crossing of a Ferry, nor murdered by Highway-

men, nor perish upon the Road by any other Accident; because these things, I say, cannot be strictly demonstrated, must he therefore resolve to stay at Home, at all Hazards, and not make the best Preparation he can for his Journey? If any Man thinks he can produce better Proofs, for Religion, than those we already have; no doubt but every Man, as far as he is capable, ought fairly to weigh and consider them: But if we already have as much as may abundantly satisfy every sober and impartial Man, and the Arguments for Religion do vastly over-balance those few trifling Pretences, that are brought against it; must we suddenly sit down (and that with the greatest Hazard of eternal Misery) in Atheism, Scepticism, or Infidelity; for no other Reason but that we have not that *strict, infallible Proof* of things, which neither does their Nature require, nor our own perhaps is capable of receiving?

§ XXVII. The other Difficulty which arises upon this Discourse, is, That however rational and satisfactory all this Account which we give of our Religion may, to Men of Sense and Understanding, appear to be; yet the vulgar Sort, which are much the greatest part of Mankind, are not only ignorant of it all, but even altogether incapable of apprehending the Force of the several Arguments contained in it; as will soon appear to any Man that makes the Experiment. Either then we must suppose numberless Millions of Men to be under no Obligation of embracing or professing any Religion at all, or the Foundation of such Obligation must be laid upon some other and plainer Account of things, that may not be above the Reach of their Capacity.

For answer hereunto, I desire that these two things may be duly considered:

First,

Sect. XXVII. *by the Test of* REASON. 101

First, That many Men there are in the World, who have a very sufficient Understanding of much more than what in Words they are well able to express: For Example; A Man altogether illiterate, oftentimes follows the Business of his particular Calling with Prudence and Discretion; which plainly shews that he has a just and right Notion of Things, so far at least as to guide and direct him in his private Affairs: But if, upon many Occasions, you desire him in Words to express the Grounds and Reasons of what he does, you will find him, being no Master at all of Language, but very imperfectly able to do it: Now let us suppose the same Man (which very often is the Case) to be very regular in the Performance of all the Duties of Religion; constant in the Worship of God, both public and private; frequent at the Holy Communion; just, true, sober, temperate, charitable, and obedient to lawful Authority; and all this, as far as ever we are able to judge, upon a true Principle of Conscience; is not such constant and uniform Regularity of his Life and Actions, as clear a Proof that he has also a due Apprehension of the Things of Religion, sufficient to direct and support him through God's Grace in the Practice of it: Although at the same time, if you ask him *a Reason of the Hope that is in him*, and of all that he does on that Account, his Answer as to the outward Form of Expression will appear but weak and imperfect: And must be supplied, as to that Defect, by the Discretion and Charity of him that makes the Enquiry? It is therefore a great Mistake if we conclude, that Men understand little or nothing of Religion, or the Reason of it, only because they know not how to cloth their Thoughts with Words or Expressions, that carry any tolerable Propriety in them: In many Cases a Man's Actions much more certainly than his Words, do shew wh

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his Judgment is, and what are the inward Thoughts and Sentiments of his Mind.

Secondly, If we rightly distinguish between Religion strictly and properly so called (which comprehends no more than what is ordinarily required for the Salvation of every Man) and Notions or Doctrines, whether false or true which have been mixed with, and by many adopted into it; whatever Abstruseness or Difficulty may occur in many of the latter, there is nothing in the former, (I mean as far as it is necessary to be understood,) or in the Grounds or Reasons of it, that is above the Capacity of every Man of common Understanding that sober and diligently makes Enquiry into it. The Nature of God, the Extent of his Attributes, and the utmost Depth of all those Mysteries which *in part* are only revealed unto us in the Gospel, (1 Cor. xiii. 9.) are altogether as incomprehensible and unfathomable to the Learned as to the Unlearned: But what Man almost is there of so mean a Capacity, that may not, with moderate Instruction and due Attention thereunto, be fully and rationally convinced of the Being and chief Attributes of God, from the very Structure of the World; of the Truth of Christianity from the well-attested Prophecies and Miracles, (besides its own internal Goodness) whereby it is confirmed; and lastly of all, those Doctrines and Rules of Life that are necessary to Salvation, from the main Tenor and Design of the Holy Scriptures, in which all sorts of Christians do agree, as I have already though briefly set forth the whole matter: It is not every Man indeed who may be capable of disputing, or maintaining an Argument for Religion, as I have already said: But if Men generally do not understand as much of it as is necessary to Salvation, nor are able to give some tolerable Account (however imperfectly expressed) why they hope to be saved in and by it, the
Fault

Sect. XXVIII. *by the Test of* REASON. 103

Fault is not that the thing itself is above their Capacity; but either that they want good and plain Instruction, or else will not give sufficient Attention to it; and let **thus much suffice to have been spoken** to the second Difficulty.

§ XXVIII. And now for a conclusion of all: I have only this to add; That whatever Knowledge or Understanding in Religion, or the Grounds and Reasons of it any Man may have, if he does not carefully and conscientiously bring forth the Fruit of it in a truly virtuous and pious Life; it will be so far from being of any advantage to him, that, on the contrary, it will most certainly turn to his greater Condemnation; *the Servant who knows not his Lord's Will, and, by Reason of his Ignorance, commits things in themselves worthy of Stripes, has something to plead in excuse for himself (at least if his Ignorance be not through his own Fault or Neglect) and shall be beaten but with few Stripes; but that Servant who knows his Lord's Will, and yet prepares not himself, neither does according to his Will; such a Servant as this, not only in the highest Degree affronts his Lord, but also gives great Scandal and evil Example, to his Fellow-Servants; and therefore is most justly sentenced to be beaten with many Stripes; for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required, Luke xii. 47, 48.*



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